National Human Rights Public Association
"Belarusian Helsinki Committee"

ELECTIONS

of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the Fourth Convocation (September 28, 2008)

MONITORING RESULTS

Moscow
2009

Elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the Fourth Convocation (September 28, 2008): Monitoring Results / NHRPA “Belarusian Helsinki Committee”; gen. ed. by A. Hulak. – M., 2009. – 72 p.

Published by the Moscow Helsinki Group,
22-1 Bolshoi Golovin Per., Moscow, Russia 107045

Published by the “Microprint” Publishers,
15-10 Kedrova St., Moscow, Russia 117036
Circulation – 1500 copies. For free distribution.

LIST OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATION

BAP	Belarusian Agrarian Party
BelTA	Belarusian Telegraph Agency
BelTIZ	Belarusian Fellowship of Vision Invalids
BPF	Belarusian People's Front
BRYU	Belarusian Republic's Youth Union
BSDP (H)	Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada)
BSDP (PH)	Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (People's Hramada)
CC	Central Committee
CEC	Central Electoral Commission
CHC	City House of Culture
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoEC	Constituency Electoral Commission
CPB	Communist Party of Belarus
DIA	Department of Internal Affairs
DOSAAF	Voluntary Society for Assisting Army, Aviation and Marine (in Soviet Union)
EC	Electoral Code
HC	House of Culture
HR	House of Representatives
HUS	Housing and Utility Services
IE	Individual Entrepreneur
IRISEPS	Independent Research Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies
KGB	Committee of State Security
LDPB	Liberal-Democratic Party of Belarus
LLC	Limited Liability Company
MfE	Ministry for Emergencies
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NA	National Assembly
NHRPA “BHC”	National Human Rights Public Association “Belarusian Helsinki Committee”
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OJSC	Open Joint-Stock Company
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA	Public Association
PBPF	Party of Belarusian People's Front
PCB	Party of Communists Belarusian
PEC	Precinct Electoral Commission
PHI	Public Health Institution
PUE	Production Unitary Enterprise
RAUE	Republic's Agricultural Unitary Enterprise
REP	Independent Trade Union of Radio and Electronic Industries
ROVD	District Interior Department
RPA	Republic's Public Association
RPLJ	Republic's Party of Labour and Justice
RUE	Republic's Unitary Enterprise
SB	“Sovietskaya Belorussiya”
SPUE	Sales and Production Unitary Enterprise
SUPE	State Unitary Production Enterprise
TPP	Thermal Power Plant
UCP	United Civil Party
UDF	United Democratic Forces
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

INTRODUCTION

The National Human Rights Public Association "Belarusian Helsinki Committee" (NHRPA "BHC"), acting in conformity with its Charter and on the basis of the legislation in force, held a monitoring of the campaign on elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the 4th convocation, which took place on September 28, 2008. The monitoring was conducted in collaboration with other human rights activists, who decided to join this work. First of all, these were former members of the Human Rights Centre "Vyasna" (Spring), liquidated by the authorities in 2003. Therefore, the monitoring was held under the aegis of the campaign "Human rights activists for free elections".

The monitoring was conducted by 287 long-term observers, who monitored all the electoral procedures, starting from the moment of announcing the elections, and by over 200 short-term observers, who monitored the procedures of voting and vote tabulation. Nomination of the observers was made in different forms as envisaged by the legislation.

The monitoring was conducted in all major cities of Belarus: Minsk, Brest, Grodno, Vitebsk, Mogilyov, Gomel, Baranovichi, Molodechno, Glubokoe, Polotsk, Novopolotsk, Orsha, Borisov, Zhodino, Bobruisk, Mozyr, Svetlogorsk, Pinsk, and in the adjacent territories. The long-term monitoring embraced 86 electoral constituencies out of 110.

In comparison with previous election campaigns, this time, the opportunities for nominating national observers became somewhat better, since central ruling bodies of political parties and nationwide public associations were granted the right, according to the statement of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), to send their observers to any electoral commissions. However, same as before, the opportunities for observing were highly restricted by non-transparency of all electoral procedures, especially of vote tabulation. Throughout the whole election campaign, the CEC and top state officials made public statements that the elections would be transparent to the maximum possible extent. However, in practice, no noticeable changes took place.

In early June of 2008, observers faced multiple obstacles to their activities, as well as actions of prosecution and intimidation. Control at crossing state border became tougher, observers and their families were exposed to tax inspections, and the Tax Inspectorate of the Moskovskiy District of the city of Minsk started an off-schedule complex revision of the

BHC. However, after public statements about the obstacles to running the observation, the pressure was stopped, and further work went on without any obvious problems.

The observation was based on the techniques developed by the ODIHR of the OSCE; and the main attention was given to observance of the Belarusian legislation and fundamental principles of free and fair elections as fixed by the Copenhagen Document of the OSCE.

In the course of these elections, political parties did not conduct any broad observation campaign, therefore the information presented by the initiative "Human rights activists for free elections" was an important source for non-state mass media, which covered the course of elections. As a result, almost 13% of Belarusians, according to the Independent Research Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies IRISEPS, knew about the observation, organized by human rights activists, which, given the closed information environment, can be regarded a relatively high figure.

It is necessary to note here that, according to the IRISEPS, independent national observation has the highest trust among residents of Belarus, even as compared with the observation performed by the OSCE and CIS.

The elections were held on the basis of the Electoral Code (EC) and other legislation, which repeatedly was an object of criticism for national and international observers, and also was negatively assessed by legal opinions of the ODIHR of the OSCE and the Venetian Commission of the Council of Europe.

The public and political atmosphere, in which the election campaign was launched, also failed to promote the necessary conditions for holding truly free and fair elections.

A peculiarity of these elections was in the fact they took place at the background of the events related to the explosion in Minsk on July 3, 2008, during official celebrations of the Independence Day. The unrestrained position of a number of state-owned printed and electronic media, which actually accused the opposition of preparing and committing the act of terror, did not favour any calm atmosphere of the election campaign. In the context of the inquiry actions undertaken under this fact, many participants of the election process were summoned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and KGB (Committee of State Security), interrogated, had their fingerprints taken, etc. It should be noted that quite often these facts were perceived by the participants of the election process as politically-motivated pressure. The political prisoners that the country had, prosecution of political and public activists, intimidation by the KGB, ousting of democratic political and

civil structures out of legal space told negatively on the chances to hold a real political contest.

The state-owned media failed to present complete and truthful information, required for the voters to make their reasonable choice, while production and dissemination of independent printed media were practically blocked by state monopolies.

Systematic violations of civil and political rights, excessive state control over society, including through use of the contract employment system, gave no opportunity to people of enjoying at least the minimum required level of freedom.

An essential distinction of this political campaign from previous ones was the fact that already at the very start thereof the top officials of the country, including the President and the Chair of the CEC, made public statements about their intention to hold really free and fair elections; the state propaganda gave up its anti-European rhetoric and proclaimed the course towards rapprochement with European countries.

An important step of Belarusian authorities towards mitigating the atmosphere of fear reigning in the country was early release on 16.08.2008 of the last political prisoner ex-candidate for President Alexander Kazulin, undertaken under the pressure of the international community.

Unfortunately, these changes were just of cosmetic character and resulted in no real improvement of the election procedures, which could have improved the trust to the election outcomes. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that certain mitigation in running the political campaign took place. It was embodied in a certain decrease of the number of obstacles erected by the authorities for agitation conducted by political parties and independent candidates.

I. FORMATION OF CONSTITUENCY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS (COEC)

Organizational measures for ensuring the victory at the elections of authorities' nominees were taken already at formation of electoral constituencies.

At the formation stage of constituency electoral commissions, in accordance with the legislation, political parties, public associations and electoral headquarters of would-be candidates for deputies were nominating their candidates for the members of constituency electoral commissions. Essential activities were observed in the city of Brest, where in March 2008 regional branches of the following oppositional parties – Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada) (BSDP (H)), United Civil Party (UCP), Party of Communists Belarusian (PCB) and Party of Belarusian People's Front (PBPF) – concluded a coalition agreement for the period of preparation and holding the parliamentary elections. On June 5, the city of Brest hosted a sitting of the Board of Entrepreneurs, where programme documents were discussed for handing over to candidates for Deputies to the House of Representatives (HR) of the National Assembly (NA). On June 4-6, entrepreneurs disseminated over 1000 information leaflets in the city marketplaces.

During the election campaign, the state-owned regional press became noticeably more active in regular publishing of frankly propagandistic articles, aimed to support in public conscience the confidence of stability and social justice of the state and advantages of the course pursued by the authorities. "Student's Scholarships "Gain Weight"" ("Selskaya Pravda" (Zhabinka), No.51, 02.07.2008); "Drops Strike Not by Force but by Falling Frequency" ("Narodnaya Trybuna" (Brest), 5.07.2008); "Social Pensions Grow from July 1" ("Brestskaya Gazeta", No.27, 04.07.2008).

Facts were registered, when in official regional press materials were published having the character of pre-schedule agitation for the incumbent Deputies of the House of Representatives of the 3rd convocation, who were going to run for Deputies of the House of the 4th convocation. The article "Waited-for Pharmacy" ("Brestskiy Vestnik", No.27, 02.07.2008) reported about opening of a pharmacy in the city of Brest. The photo depicted Oleg Velichko, a Deputy of the HR of the NA from the Brest-Western Constituency, and Mikhail Evtukh, head of the Administration of the Leninskiy District of Brest. Deputy Evgeniy Kazimirchik from the Beryoza Electoral Constituency congratulated, via the "Mayak" newspaper, his electorate on the Independence Day ("Mayak", No.52, 02.07.2008); the article "Pharmacy's House-Warming"

("Mayak", No.53, 05.07.2008) was telling about the Deputy's efforts to improve the legislation, including the Law "On Public Health". Nina Fedaruk, Deputy from the Mukhovets Electoral Constituency, congratulated, via newspapers "Golas Chasu" (Malorita, 02.07.2008) and "Zarya nad Bugom" (Brest, No.51-52, 04.07.2008), residents of the Malorita District on the state holiday, while the newspaper "Selskaya Pravda" (Zhabinka, 05.07.2008) was reporting about her participation in the gala rally and published her congratulations.

The official regional papers practically failed to publish any materials about the campaign launched in the country, except for regulatory legal acts on the elections. On July 10, journalists of the "Brestskiy Vestnik", official newspaper of the Brest City Executive Committee, informed the observers that none of the correspondents had received editorial assignments to prepare any special materials about the election campaign. The editorial board received no official information about the organization of the election process. Official regional papers were publishing information of the BelTA (Belarusian Telegraph Agency) and reprinting materials from central newspapers aimed at discrediting the would-be democratic candidates and representatives of the opposition as a whole. A report from the sitting chaired by the President of Belarus on organization and holding the elections ("Zarya" (regional newspaper of the Brest Region), No.76, 12.07.2008) ran: "Our "conscious" so-called oppositionists who strive for power have no workplaces but live better than anybody in the Republic. " The article "Who Wanted to Blow up the Feast?" reprinted from "Sovietskaya Belorussiya" ("SB") ("Zarya", 08.07.2008, and "Liakhavitski Vesnik" No.52, 09.07.2008) persuaded the reader that the explosion in the Belarusian capital was committed by "rabid politicians".

Independent regional press was passive in covering the start of the election campaign. The article "Process Is Underway, or Start of Election Process" ("Brestskiy Courier", No.27, 03.07.2008) made some analysis of preparation of pro-governmental public associations to the elections. In particular, it reported about the expanded sitting of the National Board of the Republic's Public Association (RPA) "Belaya Rus", which took place on June 25 and where Alexander Radskov, leader of the Association, promised to render active support to those members who planned to run for the Parliament. Information was presented about preparation for the elections of the Public Association (PA) "Belarusian Republic's Youth Union (BRYU)"; and statements of Alexander Dolzhevskiy, Chairman of the BRYU's Central Committee (CC) and Member of the Council of the Republic, were quoted.

Nomination of candidates from political parties and public associations for members of electoral commissions

The political parties-members of the Coalition of United Democratic Forces (hereinafter – UDF) drew up a joint list of candidates to be nominated for members of constituency electoral commissions, which was approved by the UDF's Political Board on June 8, 2008. The list was formed under the following criteria: experience of work in state bodies, civil and political status, place of work and education level. The UDF list included 110 persons (equal to the number of constituencies); among them such public and political figures like Stanislav Shushkevich, Mechislav Gryb, Alexander Sosnov, Pavel Kozlovskiy, Lev Margolin, and others.

The Political Board of the UDF stated that the fact of inclusion or non-inclusion of the candidates from the UDF list into electoral commissions will be one of the preconditions for recognition or non-recognition of parliamentary elections by the international community. Anatoly Lebedska, leader of the United Civil Party (UCP), expressed his opinion that in case of non-inclusion of the members of the parties-members of the UDF into constituency electoral commissions, a variant will be considered to recall all the candidates for deputies and campaign for boycotting the elections.

In her turn, Lydia Ermoshina, Chair of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), stated that the UDF's desire about inclusion of their representatives into constituency electoral commissions will be taken into account as much as possible. According to her story, President Lukashenko spoke positively about inclusion of members of political parties into constituency electoral commissions, however, with account of their working experience and "other advantages", including "political ripeness".

Nomination of candidates for members of constituency electoral commissions was officially announced also by the leadership of the RPA "Belaya Rus", which was registered in December 2007. According to information of Alexander Shadsko, Deputy Chair of the RPA "Belaya Rus", 110 persons were nominated by the Association to run for constituency electoral commissions (that is, into all of them).

Approval of commissions

On July 14, 2008, joint sittings were held of the Presidiums of Regional Soviets of Deputies and Regional Executive Committees, the Minsk City Executive Committee and the Minsk Soviet of Deputies. These sittings considered the issue of forming the constituency electoral commissions. Decisions of these bodies of local government formed 110 constituency

electoral commissions. In total, the subjects, entitled to nominate their candidates for to constituency electoral commissions (citizens, labour collectives, public associations and political parties), nominated 1853 candidates, while the maximum number of members in these commissions was 1430 persons (110 x 13). According to Nikolai Lozovik, Secretary of the CEC, out of 1853 candidates, most were nominated by citizens – 39.8%, then – by public associations (25.5%), then – by political parties (20%), and, finally, – by labour collectives (14.7%). Mr Lozovik noted that the political parties, which "position themselves as oppositional", had nominated 118 candidates for members of constituency commissions (31.9% of all nominees from political parties); and 18 persons had been nominated by the PA BPF "Revival", which made 3.8% of all nominees from public associations. Thus, all in all, the UDF had nominated 136 persons.

Among the political parties, which nominated their candidates for members of constituency electoral commissions, most active ones were: the Party of Communists Belarusian (PCB) – 91 persons (24.5% of all partisan nominees), Belarusian Agrarian Party – 62 persons (16.7%), United Civil Party (UCP) – 50 persons (13.5%), and the Party of Belarusian People's Front (PBPF) – 34 persons (9.2%).

Public associations were represented as follows: the PA "BRYU" – 109 persons (23.2% of all nominees from public associations), the RPA "Belaya Rus" – 94 persons (19.4%) and the Belarusian Public Association of Veterans – 71 persons (15.2%).

The CEC had noted that electoral commissions will be formed on the basis of contest and competition. It is necessary to note that same as at previous election campaigns, in the campaign of 2008 the candidates for members of electoral commissions were not invited to the joint sittings of Presidiums of Regional Soviets of Deputies and Regional Executive Committees, and they were not informed about the consideration results of their applications on nomination. The sittings made only formal approval of the membership of constituency commissions, without any discussion of candidates. In the opinion of observers, this is an indication of the fact that the lists of members of constituency commissions had been formed beforehand. No "contest" or "competition" among the nominees into commissions, against what had been earlier promised by the CEC Secretary, was ever observed. Same as in the course of previous election campaigns, the criteria, used by Regional Executive Committees and Regional Soviets when forming constituency commissions, remained unclear.

As a rule, representatives of broad public and mass media were not allowed to be present at the sittings of Regional Executive Committees and

Regional Soviets. For example, Leonid Markhotka, representative of the National Human Rights Public Association (NHRPA) “Belarusian Helsinki Committee” (BHC), was not admitted to the joint sitting of the Minsk Regional Executive Committee and Minsk Regional Soviet of Deputies. Likewise, another BHC member Vladimir Osipchik was not admitted to the sitting of the Minsk City Executive Committee and Minsk City Soviet of Deputies. A similar situation took place also in the Vitebsk Region, where BHC representatives Vasyl Beresnyov and Vadim Barscheuski were not admitted to the joint sitting of the Vitebsk Regional Soviet and Regional Executive Committee; representatives of independent mass media were also deprived of the right to be present at that sitting.

No information about formation of constituency commissions was given to representatives of the political parties – UCP, PBPF and PCB, – which had nominated their candidates for constituency electoral commissions of the city of Minsk and Minsk Region. Representatives of the BHC and other subjects of the Grodno Region were refused any information about the formation results of constituency electoral commissions of their Region.

However, in certain localities representatives of broad public and mass media were admitted to the sittings. Thus, observers and journalists were admitted to the sitting of the Brest Regional Soviet of Deputies and Brest Regional Executive Committee. Later, they stuck to the opinion that the decisions on the members of commissions had been made well before the sitting, which thus acquired a formal character and lasted for no more than 25 minutes. In the course of the sitting some general information was reported, including the fact that the “contest” to the commission of Brest-Central Constituency No.2 made 1.7 persons per place, to the commission of Mukhovets Constituency No.4 – 1.5 persons per place. The Chairman of the Brest Regional Executive Committee Konstantin Sumar stated that every commission included the maximum possible number of members – 13 persons. “We made a decision to include representatives of all, without exception, public organizations and political parties as members of commissions, “ said Mr Sumar. The voting was unanimous. When asked by S. Vakulenko about selection criteria of those members of the commissions, who were nominated through citizens’ signing-in, the answer was given that these were “the best match criteria. “ The restricted number of places in the commissions was emphasized. None of the invitees to the sitting could find out anything about the procedure of discussing candidates and formation of final lists: all the questions were answered as follows: “not enough places”, “this one was the first to apply”, “these are better informed” or “for the commission to be able to work. “ The information was presented in a very quick manner. The requests to clarify some information about particular

approved members of commissions were answered: “you will read everything in newspapers. “ Meanwhile, it became known that, for example, five members of the constituency commission of Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3 worked in them without replacement from 2004: Inna Akimova (chief specialist of the education department of the administration of the Moskovskiy District of Brest); Valentina Babicheva (Director of Primary School No.36 of Brest); Nadezhda Zaitseva (head of the office of the administration of the Moskovskiy District of Brest); Zinaida Medichenko (pensioner, a member of the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB)); and Galina Yangolenko (Director of Nursery-Kindergarten No.69 of Brest).

In the Grodno Region, when receiving documents from nominees of the UDF, the bodies in charge of forming commissions registered, irrespective of the submission date, practically all of them under one and the same registration number – 17. This fact evidences a tendentious approach of power structures to UDF candidates. The officials responsible for forming constituency commissions, in particular, Leonid Ermantovich, head of the department of organizational-cadre work of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee, refused to give any information about the commission formation process to leaders of political parties, human rights defenders and journalists. Bureaucrats advised “to read the local press. “ We remind you that the sitting took place on July 14, but the next issue of “Grodnenskaya Pravda” appeared only on July 16, 2008.

Nomination of candidates by labour collectives

Nomination of candidates for constituency electoral commissions by labour collectives was non-transparent, therefore, the procedure can be judged only by the news items received by observers indirectly, and not from direct sources. In the Mogilyov Region, none of the monitoring participants managed to get to any of the meetings of labour collectives, where candidates for members of constituency commissions were nominated. It was impossible to get any information on the issue from the officials of this Regional Executive Committee.

Observers of the BHC doubted the legality of nomination from the labour collective of the Open Joint-Stock Company (OJSC) “Belaruskabel” (Mozyr) and further approval as a member of the commission of Mozyr Electoral Constituency No.42 of Ivan Novitskiy, deputy director of the enterprise for ideological work. None of the interrogated workers of this enterprise could remember that a meeting was ever held to nominate him for the commission.

Everywhere, nominees for would-be members of CoECs from labour collectives were directors or heads of these collectives, therefore, this way of nomination can be regarded as use of administrative resource. For example, Tatiana Latysheva was nominated to the commission of Baranovichi-Eastern Constituency No.6 from the labour collective of the department of labour, employment and social security of the Baranovichi City Executive Committee; Ms Latysheva was the head of this collective. Besides, later she was appointed to be the chair of the commission. The commission of Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8 was chaired by Victor Grytsuk, head of the education department of the Kamenets District Executive Committee, who was nominated by this collective. Alexander Pasevich, deputy chair of this commission, is director of the branch "Pruzhanski Raipalivzbyt" of the Brest Regional Unitary Enterprise "Housing and Utility Services" (HUS), and he was nominated by the labour collective of this branch. The labour collective of the Limited Liability Company (LLC) "KPVS" nominated Mikhail Tabalevich, its director, to the commission of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1. Leonid Pleskatsevich, director of the KUMPP "Promstroienergo", was nominated by the labour collective of this enterprise to the commission of Ivatsevichi Electoral Constituency No.11.

Nomination of candidates from citizens through signing-in (collection of subscriptions)

The share in the commissions of rural electoral constituencies of the members nominated through citizens' signing-in was essential. However, officials from power bodies and members of economic nomenclature dominate among them. For example, 7 persons (54% of the total commission) got into the commission of Baranovichi Rural Constituency No.7 through citizens' signing-in. Among them: Alyona Kuntsevich, head of the organizational-cadre division of the Lyakhovichi District Executive Committee; Leonid Kaubasa, head of the ideological division of the Lyakhovichi District Executive Committee, Nikolai Burak, head of the social care fund of the Lyakhovichi District. 4 persons (31% of the total commission) got into the commission of Ivatsevichi Constituency No.11 through citizens' signing-in, among them: Mikhail Pisch, head of the Gantsevichi District communication centre and leader of the district branch of the RPA "Belaya Rus"; Alexei Syzrantsev, head of the Gantsevichi District Inspectorate of Natural Resources and Environment Protection and leader of the PA "Citadel", which was registered by the department of Justice of the Brest Regional Executive Committee back before the 2001 presidential

and declared support of the President's course as its mission; and Taisa Kuis (director of a procurement company).

The monitoring participants note that representatives of pro-governmental structures were nominated for members of electoral commissions by using several ways at the same time, as stipulated by the electoral legislation. For example, Lyubov Zhybul was nominated to the commission of Stolbtsy Electoral Constituency No. 77 from the PA «BRYU» and RPA «Belaya Rus», and also from citizens by means of submitting an application. Vladimir Karvatka (Pukhovichi Electoral Constituency No. 73) was nominated from the PA «Belarusian Union of Officers» and Belarusian Public Association of Veterans.

The trends and regularities in formation of constituency commissions can be traced in the example of the Brest Region.

It was announced at the joint sitting of the Presidium of the Brest Regional Executive Committee and Brest Regional Soviet of Deputies on formation of constituency electoral commissions that in total in the Brest Region 260 persons were nominated to local constituency commissions. Of them, 54 persons were nominated by labour collectives, 55 – through citizens' signing-in, 56 – from political parties (8 parties), and 65 persons –

Name of Party or Public Association	*Nominated*	*Included*
Belarusian Agrarian Party	9	4
BSDP (H)	2	1
CPB	15	9
LDPB	3	1
UCP	8	2
PBPF	9	2
PCB	4	1
RPLJ	6	3
RPA «Belaya Rus»	16	9
PA «BRYU»	16	13
PA «Belarusian Union of Women»	2	2
Belarusian Public Association of Veterans	7	4
PA BPF «Revival»	3	1
PA «For Union and Union's Communist Party»	6	1
Belarusian Trade Union of Agrarians	3	3
Belarusian Union of Officers	11	3

from public associations (from 9 PAs). Thus, nominees of political parties and PAs combined made 121 persons (47%). Of them, 26 persons were candidates for constituency commissions from oppositional parties and associations. It makes exactly 10% of all the nominees, and 21% of all public and political activists.

In total, 208 persons were included into constituency commissions of the Brest Region. Of them, representatives of political parties and PAs – 59 persons (28%). Of them, members of commissions from oppositional parties and PAs – 7 persons. This makes 3% from the total number of members of commissions, and 12% of all public and political activists, included into commissions. Thus, at registration the number of oppositional candidates for constituency commissions dropped by more than 3 times, while their share among representatives of parties and PAs almost halved.

The constituency commission of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1 included in total 13 persons, of them: chiefs of the City Executive Committee, District Executive Committees and state enterprises of various levels – 7 persons (54%); nominees of political parties and PAs – 5 persons (39%), representing the PA "BRYU", RPA "Belaya Rus", PA "For Union and Union's Communist Party", CPB and RPLJ.

The constituency commission of Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3 included in total 13 persons, of them: bosses of the City Executive Committee, District Executive Committees and state enterprises of various levels – 10 persons (77%); nominees of political parties and PAs – 4 persons (31%), representing the BRYU, CPB, RPLJ and Belarusian Public Association of Veterans.

The constituency commission of Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8 included in total 13 persons. The observers were not provided with any data about the places of work of the commission members. Of them, 3 persons (23%) were nominated by political parties and PAs and represented the BRYU, RPA "Belaya Rus" and BSDP (H).

The long-term observers of the BHC registered facts of creating structures for holding elections, not stipulated by the electoral legislation. For example, in Zhodino Electoral Constituency No.66, at the first sitting of the electoral commission, Alexander Pugach was elected its chair (he is also Chairman of the Zhodino City Soviet of Deputies and was nominated from the Presidium of the Minsk Regional Soviet of Deputies). He said in his speech: "In parallel to the constituency electoral commission, we have also formed the city headquarters for holding the elections, with which we'll work together for proper holding the elections".

At the formation stage of constituency commissions, cases were registered of pressure by the authorities on independent would-be candidates for deputies. On June 25, the workplace of Nikolai Charnavus, an individual entrepreneur from Baranovichi, who wanted to get nominated as a candidate from the UCP, was visited by an off-schedule revision group of the regional level. It is notable that the group included a lieutenant colonel from the department for fighting economic crime of the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) of the Brest Regional Executive Committee and an employee of the tax inspectorate. Mr Charnavus was fined by 175,000 roubles and was forced to pay it promptly. Later, the entrepreneur was notified that he was deprived of the earlier allocated land plot for building a cafй. “I was gathering various papers for three years, paid money, ordered project documentation at the “Belzhilproject”, “ Nikolai Charnavus complained. “It looks like the authorities dislike the idea that Charnavus decided to take part in the elections”.

On June 30, Alexander Mekh, leader of the Kobrin branch of the PBPF, was dismissed from his position of operation engineer of low-pressure gas networks of the Kobrin Department of Gas Main Pipelines of the OJSC “Beltransgaz”. In his opinion, the reason of dismissal was the information that he had been included into the list of 110 candidates from the UDF. The talk with A. Mekh, during which he received threats not to extend his contract and hamper his employment elsewhere, in general, was conducted by Vladimir Galashko, head of the Kobrin Department of Gas Main Pipelines, in the presence of Andrei Basko, head of the Kobrin District KGB Division. On July 8, at 12:11 a.m. A. Mekh received a telephone call with threats and insults. The number of the calling party was fixed: +375164225659, registered for the reception room of the Deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus from Kobrin Constituency, who at that moment was Victor Kuchinskiy. A. Mekh filed a complaint to Mikhail Zaporozhchenko, Public Prosecutor of the Kobrin District.

The formation procedure of constituency electoral commissions was formal – the candidates, who were nominated to the commissions by the bodies in charge of forming such commissions, were not discussed; just the lists prepared beforehand were approved.

Like during previous election campaigns, the criteria of selecting members of electoral commissions remained unclear. The absence of such clearly formulated criteria allowed local authorities (Regional Executive Committees and Regional Soviets of Deputies) to form constituency commissions based on the principle of controllability.

The citizens who were rejected to become members of constituency commissions were in fact deprived of any chance to appeal against the decision of the bodies, which formed the commissions, including by means of a judicial procedure. In accordance with part 4, Article 122, of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, decisions of local power bodies can be appealed against in a judicial procedure. However, in practice, courts refuse to accept such claims to consideration.

In most cases (in four out of six Regions) representatives of public associations, democratic parties and mass media were not admitted to joint sitting of Regional Executive Committees and Regional Soviets. Thus, the practice of previous election campaigns was observed again, when such important events of the election campaign like formation of constituency commissions were non-transparent, without participation of representatives of broad public.

In a number of cases, officials of Regional Executive Committees refused to acquaint monitors with minutes of sittings of labour collectives, where their candidates for constituency electoral commissions.

As a positive fact we can note a growth in the number of candidates from oppositional parties and public associations who were included into constituency electoral commissions. Thus, in the course of the previous elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives in 2004, the constituency electoral commissions included 22 representatives of oppositional parties and associations, while this time 38 representatives of the political parties-members of the UDF were included into constituency commissions, which made 32% of all their nominees (118 persons) and 2.2% of the total commissions.

We remind you that the political parties, which had formed the UDF, proposed to include one their member into every constituency commission. The UDF formed a list of 110 candidates into commissions. This requirement was considered as a minimum precondition moved by oppositional parties for democratization of the electoral process. However, the authorities failed to observe it.

The constituency electoral commissions were formed without broad presentation of all subjects of the electoral process.

Like in previous elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives, most of the members of constituency electoral commissions were from pro-governmental political parties and public associations (CPB, RPA “Belaya Rus”, PA “BRYU”), labour collectives, representatives of the bodies which had formed the commission. Besides, in most cases, the chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries of constituency electoral commissions became

representatives of local power bodies or heads of state-owned enterprises and organizations.

Monitoring participants noted facts of forming the so-called "headquarters for holding elections" and "working groups" under local executive bodies. It is worth noting that the electoral legislation does not stipulate formation of such bodies; their authorities and competence are also unknown. Formation of such bodies gives rise to concern, since they can be used by local power bodies for controlling the elections.

Thus, despite a certain increase of oppositional representatives in the CoECs, the formation procedure of electoral commissions remained the same, and power bodies revealed no changes in their approaches to formation of commissions. Constituency electoral commissions failed to represent the broad public and all the participants of the electoral process. Presentation of oppositional parties in commissions id still decided by the will of local power, while the formation procedure as such is closed for the public community.

II. NOMINATION AND REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES FOR DEPUTIES

A candidate for Deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus can be nominated by means of citizens' signing-in (collection of voters' subscriptions) in accordance with the legislation in force (Article 65 of the Electoral Code (EC)) by a group of citizens (initiative group) comprising at least 10 persons. The list of members of the initiative group, with indication of its leader, is submitted, together with a registration application, to the constituency electoral commission not later than 65 days prior to the voting date. These documents shall be submitted by the person who intends to get nominated for a candidate for deputy. The list shall include the following data: for the person willing to get nominated as a candidate for deputy – surname, name, patronymic, date of birth, profession, position (occupation), place of work, residence, and party affiliation; for the leader of the initiative group and its every member – surname, name, patronymic, date of birth and residence.

The constituency electoral commission shall consider the documents within five days and, should they meet the electoral legislation, register the initiative group and issue respective certificates to its members and forms for collecting subscriptions.

The constituency electoral commission can reject registration of the initiative group in the following cases:

- When the person, who is willing to get nominated as a candidate for deputy, is not a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, and does not live in the territory of the Republic of Belarus;
- When the number of members of the initiative is less than 10 persons;
- When the principle of free participation in elections was broken at formation of the group;
- When citizens who have no suffrage are included into the initiative group;
- In other cases of breaching the Electoral Code.

The decision to deny registration of the initiative group shall be issued to the applicant not later than the following day after its adoption, or sent, within the same period, to the applicant by registered mail.

According to the Calendar Plan, the process of submitting applications on registration of initiative groups was over on June 24, while decisions on registration were passed by the constituency electoral commissions before July 29, 2008.

Nomination through collection of voters' subscriptions

Analysis of the procedure of nomination of candidates and registration of initiative groups gives grounds to assert that in comparison with the previous election campaign the number of registration rejections became essentially less. According to the CEC, in Gomel Region out of 59 initiative groups, 6 were rejected registration. In the Vitebsk Region, 47 applications on registration of initiative groups were submitted, of them: for candidates from power structures – 16; for candidates from the UDF – 13; for candidates from the "European Coalition" – 12; and for independent candidates – 5. In total, 45 initiative groups were registered.

A number of CoECs did not obstruct the presence of observers at their sittings. For example, according to the observers from the BSDP (H), UCP and PCB, who were admitted to the first sittings of electoral commissions: in Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3 and Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, where all their members were present, no decisions were made, which is against the law. They even noted the favourable and friendly manner of holding the sittings.

Some initiative groups of oppositional candidates were registered prior to expiry of the term for submitting applications to constituency electoral commissions. For example, on the second day after approval of the electoral commission of Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3, an initiative group was registered of Igor Maslovskiy, a UDF candidate. He was immediately given out certificates of members of the initiative group and empty subscription lists. On 25.07.2008, Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8 registered an initiative group of Vladimir Vauranyuk, a member of the non-registered BSDP (PH).

Alexander Galkevich, the UDF candidate in Baranovichi-Eastern Constituency No.6, managed to register his initiative group only on 19.07.2008, because on the day of his first address, on 18.07.2008, the commission did not work, as its members were called to Brest. The CoEC of Orsha-Dnieper Electoral Constituency No.27 refused on 19.07.2008 to accept registration documents of the initiative group of Andrei Antashkevich, a representative of the "European Coalition", motivating that according to the Calendar Plan reception of documents started on July 20.

Within five days after submission of applications to constituency electoral commissions, the initiative groups were registered of united candidates from the UDF Anatoly Levkovich (Brest-Western Constituency No.1) and Valentina Lazarenkova (Belaya Vezha Constituency No.8). After submission

of the list for registration, Galina Cherkasova, a member of V. Lazarenkova's initiative group, a resident of Pruzhany, wrote an application asking to exclude her from the list. In a private conversation, she motivated her decision by possible problems for her son-entrepreneur. A situation of precedent appeared: in the period, when the initiative group was not yet registered, one of its members filed an application about withdrawal. However, the constituency commission did not regard it to be an obstacle, and the initiative group of V. Lazarenkova was registered provided the documents should have been corrected.

A similar situation appeared in Senno Electoral Constituency No.30, where one of the members of the initiative group in support of S. Vaznyak, a woman-resident of Bogushevsk, said orally that she had been included into the initiative group without her personal consent. As a result of consideration of evidences, presented to the commission, the problem was lifted, and the woman's application was not the basis for rejecting registration. The practice of registration of initiative groups in Senno Electoral Constituency No.30 showed that filing by members of initiative groups of applications on refusal to take part in them should not be viewed as a reason for rejection of registration. According to the Electoral Code (hereinafter – EC) of Belarus, such reason can only be absence of necessary data, inclusion of a member into an initiative group through threats and violence, inclusion of the persons having no electoral rights, and the number of members of an initiative group less than the minimum – 10 persons.

However, in Gomel Region, under such reasons related to applications of two members of the initiative group, on 25.07.2008, registration was rejected of the initiative group of the UDF candidate Pyotr Kuznetsov. Without giving any documents for examination, the commission of Gomel-Central Constituency No.33 reported that the reason to reject registration of his initiative group was the fact of inclusion of one person as a member of the initiative group without his/her consent.

On 25.07.2008, in Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58, an initiative group of Ivan Shega, a member of the PBPF and a UDF candidate, was registered in the number of 50 persons. In the course of the sitting, an observer from the BHC asked the chair of the commission about who would be Ivan Shega's rivals. He was answered that the registration process was not over yet. Although according to observers' information, subscriptions in support of Mechislav Kastsuk, Chairman of the Slonim District Executive Committee, were collected in Constituency No.58 already after 22.07.2008.

Apart from candidates from the UDF, representatives of the “European Coalition” entered the election process practically in all regions of Belarus. For example, the following persons were registered: Oleg Pashko head of the Market Board of Baranovichi entrepreneurs (Baranovichi-Eastern Constituency No.6); Dmitri Shimaites (Baranovichi Rural Constituency No.7), Slavamir Charnulich (Grodno-Zanyoman Electoral Constituency No.49), Katsyaryna Dzemyanchuk (Grodno-Central Electoral Constituency No.50), Andrei Panas (Grodno-Rural Electoral Constituency No.52) and others.

During the stage of registration of initiative groups, many observers found it impossible to get to the sittings of constituency electoral commissions. For example, Victor Kachan, an observer in Bobruisk-Pervomai Electoral Constituency No.79, applied repeatedly to the commission asking to inform him about the time of the sitting. He was replied that sittings are convoked as necessary; therefore, it was impossible to give precise information about the date. When on one of the days the observer came, on his own initiative, to the sitting of the CoEC, the commission chair Victor Gorbanyov told him that the sitting, which, according to the observer, should only begin, was already over.

A similar situation happened with Igor Khodzka and Yulia Gaurylava, observers in Bobruisk-Lenin Constituency No.78.

In many CoECs, observers were denied information about how many and whose initiative groups were registered. For example, employees of the Gomel-Soviet constituency electoral commission No.34 gave a negative answer to the request of the BHC observer.

In the commission of Baranovichi Rural Constituency No.7, even the member of the commission – Yan Savitskiy (nominee of the UCP) – was not given complete data. This issue was voted ay another sitting of the CoEC on 24.07.2008. Chair of the commission Pyotr Dubrouskiy said that presentation of such data is interference into private life of the members of the commission. Secretary of the commission of Baranovichi Rural Constituency No.7 Lyutsia Sanchuk refused to give Ya. Savitskiy a copy of the minutes of the commission sitting for appealing.

According to observers, information about registered initiative groups of the Grodno Region was very unwillingly, only after multiple requests, provided to observers in Volkovysk No.48, Grodno-Zanyoman No.49, Grodno-Central No.50, Grodno-Northern No.51, Grodno-Rural No.52, Dyatlovo No.55 and Mosty No.56 Constituencies.

Use of administrative resource at collecting subscriptions

In the course of monitoring over citizens' signing-in (collection of subscriptions) multiple facts of using administrative resources were fixed, in particular, dependence of citizens from their bosses at the place of work. For example, according to observers, in Gomel-Soviet Electoral Constituency No.34, a member of the initiative group of the incumbent Deputy of the HR of the NA Larissa Kovalyova, who is the head of a kindergarten, gave orders to her employees to sign-in for nomination of L. Kovalyova.

A frequent violation was collection of subscriptions by persons who were not members of initiative groups. According to report of observer Ya. Parchinskiy, deputy director of Secondary School No.18 of Polotsk Irina Zimnitskaya told him that her school was instructed to collect at least two hundred subscriptions for Deputy Chair of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee Pyotr Yuzhyk. In case of non-fulfilment of the instruction, the teachers were threatened to lose their bonuses.

The head of the Glubokoe District Archive issued an order for every employee of his establishment to collect 30 subscriptions in support of Vladimir Andreichenko, Chairman of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee.

Pressure on members of initiative groups and signatories

Nikolai Papeka, a member of the electoral commission of Belaya Vezha Constituency No.8 from BSDP (H), said in his private talk with observers G. Kazulka said that his district militia division received a request from the KGB in relation to N. Papeka himself, his wife and their two sons aged 13 and 19. Besides, their district militiaman visited the Papeka family and asked about their beekeeping farm – the main source of profits. The member of the electoral commission of Belaya Vezha Constituency No.8 treated these actions as pressure caused by his participation in the election campaign.

In Vitebsk-Gorki Electoral Constituency No.17, on the eve of registration of the initiative group of Tatiana Sevyarynets, three members of her group recalled their applications. As reported by T. Sevyarynets in an oral conversation, two of them were pressed by administration of enterprises, and the third one – Lydia Karpovich – was threatened with trial and eviction from the hostel where she lives with her minor children.

As a result of pressure exerted by administration of one of enterprise of the Belarusian Railways, Mikhail Shpakovskiy, a member of the BSDP

(H), gave up from registering his initiative group at Vitebsk-Railway Electoral Constituency No.19.

Practically in all regions of Belarus public activists and members of democratic political parties were interrogated and pressed on in the context of explosions in Minsk on July 3, 2008. In the course of interrogations questions were asked about participation of activists in the election campaign. Konstantin Zhukouskiy, who was nominated as candidate in Buda-Koshelev Constituency No.38, sent a complaint to the Prosecutor's Office against the actions of employees of the ROVD of the Tsentralny District of Gomel. On July 24, member of the initiative group Sergey Trifonov was telephoned several times from Tsentralny ROVD and invited to a talk in the case of explosions at night on July 4 in Minsk. When Trifonov refused to come without summon; they started threatening him by phone that he would be summoned as a suspect. Maria Tulzgankova, also a member initiative group of K. Zhukovskiy, was also telephoned from the ROVD.

Multiple cases of pressure were recorded on the voters, who subscribed to nomination of democratic candidates. On August 20, 2008, Alla Moskalenko, chief physician of the Dobrush Hospital, invited the nurses who put their signatures for the activist of the opposition Adam Varanets to her study and had a talk with them. In the course of the talk, the chief physician expressed her opinion that state servants, including nurses of the state-owned public health institution, should not sign-in for nomination of oppositional candidates.

Pressure on members of initiative groups of democratic candidates was made everywhere by managers of enterprises, law enforcement bodies and special agencies. Unidentified persons in civilian clothes repeatedly tried to make photos of the subscription collection process made by members of initiative groups in support of Igor Valyaev in Novopolotsk. In Vitebsk-Gorki Electoral Constituency No.17, Lydia Karpovich, a member of the initiative group in support of Tatiana Sevyarynets, was threatened with trial and eviction from the hostel where she lives with her minor children. According to Ms Sevyarynets, L. Karpovich was forced to file an application on quitting the initiative group.

On July 27, in Ushachi settlement, in the course of collecting subscriptions, employees of the local ROVD detained Olga Damaskina and Alexei Trubkin, members of the initiative group of Yaroslav Bernikovich. The detention was motivated by recent frequent residential burglaries in the district. The members of the initiative group had their documents checked and passport data copied.

An indicative situation was observed in Vitebsk, where ў Vitebsk-Railway Constituency No.19 an initiative group was registered in support of Andrei Levinov, district militia inspector of the Railway ROVD of the city of Vitebsk. In relation to the militia officer, endless checks of his work; the prosecutor's office made a service investigation; threats arrived and demands to retire from the MIA (expressed by head of the ROVD lieutenant colonel Sergey Blazhevich, his deputy major Shastov, and employee of the DIA of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee lieutenant colonel Pronka). A. Levinov asserts that in his relation a provocation was staged – "a fight of Andrei Levinov with his colleagues". The result of A. Levinov's campaign was his dismissal from the interior bodies on the initiative of colonel Leonid Farmagei, head of the DIA of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee.

Along with that, observers remarked a rather peaceful process of collecting subscriptions in the Grodno Region. For the first time in the latest election campaigns in Grodno and other cities of the region collection of subscriptions in the streets was allowed, and collectors actively used this opportunity, by coordinating locations of street signing-in points with constituency commissions and interior bodies. Nevertheless, the work of street subscription collectors took place under close attention of employees of the MIA and KGB, District Executive Committees and constituency commissions. Cases of pressure on certain democratic of candidates were registered. One of the incidents that took place in the Grodno Region at the stage of collection subscriptions and registration of candidates was detention by militiamen of the initiative group of Yuri Istomin, leader of the regional organization of the UCP. According to his story, on August 18, 2008 (the deadline for submitting registration documents), the initiative group was collecting subscriptions in Novogrudok. The whole time they were watched by militiamen. When collection of subscriptions was over, and the group rallied together to check the documents prior to submit them, militiamen detained the members of the initiative group and brought them to the local ROVD, where the members of the initiative group were informed that they had allegedly been engaged in pre-schedule agitation. The question when and who gave the power to militiamen to decide what was agitation, and what was not, could be answered by nobody at the ROVD, however, the detainees were asked to write explanations. The activists were released at about seven o'clock in the evening, when they had already no time for approval and submission of subscriptions. Later, it became known that the prosecutor's office of the Novogrudok District opened an administrative case against Yu. Istomin for breaching the electoral legislation. In the opinion of the prosecutor's office, Yu. Istomin

breached the legislation in force by holding pre-schedule agitation (he disseminated the newspaper “Narodnaya Svaboda” with an article about Yu. Istomin). Besides, the Novogrudok District Executive Committee sent a letter to the leaders of the UCP, which informed that, despite the detention, Istomin allegedly had time to submit documents to the constituency commission, but, however, failed to submit them by himself.

Nomination from labour collectives

As compared with the previous parliamentary elections of 2004, in 2008, the number of candidates nominated by labour collectives was essentially smaller.

Registration of candidates for deputies and appealing against registration rejection

According to the data of the CEC, in total, 365 persons were nominated as candidates for Deputies of the HR of the NA. Consequently, 276 out of them were registered, which makes 75.6% of all nominees.

Most of the UDF representatives, nominated in different ways, got registered. Out of 98 persons, nominated by the UDF, 76 were registered, which made 77.5% of all the nominees. Out of the list of the “European Coalition”, which nominated 51 persons – 23 were registered (45%). As a whole, out of 149 persons, nominated by democratic forces, 99 persons got registered (66.5%). At the previous elections to the House of Representatives of the 3rd convocation, out of 227 persons, nominated by the coalition named “5+”, 126 persons were registered as candidates for Deputies (about 55%).

Out of 29 representatives of the UCP, 26 got registered, of the PBPF – 21 and 16, PCB – 18 and 13, CPB – 17 and 13, BSDP (H) – 14 and 11, LDPB – 9 and 8, RPLJ – 5 and 3, accordingly, and from the Agrarian Party 1 candidate was registered.

Out of 56 persons, nominated by party congresses, 50 were registered as candidates for Deputies (89.3%).

Among those who were rejected registration, there were leaders of the BPF – deputy chairmen of the PBPF Vintsuk Vyachorka and Victor Ivashkevich.

Among candidates for deputies there were 58 women (21% of the total number of all registered), 18 citizens aged under 30 (6.5%), and 38 candidates were incumbent Deputies of the House of Representatives of the 3rd convocation (13.8%).

By the registration outcomes of candidates, 15 constituencies happened to be single-candidate ones (non-alternative): Ivatsevichi No.11 (Director

General of the State Unitary Production Enterprise (SUPE) “Ivatsevichi HUS” Leonid Kovalevich), Pinsk Rural No.15 (Director General of the OJSC “Pinsksaugasbud” Konstantin Shevchik), Vitebsk-Gorki No.17 (Chair of the Vitebsk City Soviet of Deputies Gennadi Gritskevich), Novopolotsk No.25 (chief physician of children polyclinic Public Health Institution (PHI) “Novopolotsk Central City Hospital” Inna Antonova), Rogachov No.45 (head of the Department of HUS of the Gomel Regional Executive Committee Vladimir Mikhasyov), Volkovysk No.48 (Chair of the Zelva District Executive Committee Leonid Elyashevich), Lida No.54 (head of the Department of Economy of the Lida District Executive Committee Tamara Kleban), Mosty No.56 (First Deputy Chair of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee Vasyl Stsyapura), Novogrudok No.57 (Director of the Republic’s Agricultural Unitary Enterprise (RAUE) “Stud Factory Karelichi” Pilip Bogush), Molodechno Rural No.71 (head of the Chief Administration of Cadre Policy of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Sinyakov), Smorgon No.59 (Deputy of the House of Representatives Tatiana Golubeva), Schuchin No.60 (Deputy Chair of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee Maria Biryukova), Borisov Rural No.63 (Director General of the Republic’s Unitary Enterprise (RUE) “Borisovkhlebprom” Vasyl Guryanov), Vileika No.64 (chief physician of the PHI “Vileika Central District Hospital” Igor Spilnichenko), Nesvizh No.72 (Director of the Schepichi Secondary School of the Kletsk District Elena Novik). All of them are candidates from the ruling power.

Out of 52 complaints received by the CEC, 8 (15.4%) were satisfied and, respectively, this number of candidates were registered as a result of considering the complaints. The Supreme Court received 19 complaints of those candidates, who were rejected both by constituency commissions and the CEC (one applicant recalled his complaint prior to consideration by the Court). Out of the remaining 18 applications, according to decisions of the Supreme Court, only 2 (11.1%) applicants were registered as candidates (Alexei Turovich, Director of the SPUE “TorgVesting”, Sukharevo Constituency No.102), Dmitri Makarov, Director General of the LLC “Makbel”, Partizan Constituency No.110). The Court found insignificant the facts that they failed to deregister from Road Inspectorate their cars sold more than 10 years ago. Turovich and Makarov were registered by the outcomes of consideration of their complaints at the Supreme Court. Thus, the Court departed from the practice formed during the previous campaigns, when such violations were regarded as doubtless grounds to reject registration. This is noted as a positive fact.

Thus, as a result of considering complaints, every fifth applicant was registered.

It should be noted that CoECs, same as before, in most cases did not allow the rejected candidates to get acquainted with the materials of the checks, which became the grounds for negative decisions. However, during this election campaign the CEC worked more openly than before: applicants were given chances to get acquainted with materials of the checks. In the course of considering complaints of non-registered candidates, the Chair of the CEC L. Ermoshina gave repeated instructions to Chairs of CoECs that they should acquaint applicants with materials of the checks, which made the grounds to reject registration.

Analysis of the stage of registration of candidates allows concluding that the numerous legal barriers established by the legislation were used by constituency commissions as pretexts to reject registration based on formal attributes, without any equal approach to all the participants of the process. The very process of examining the materials submitted for registration was closed for the interested persons and observers. None of the nominees by the power – heads of state-owned enterprises, institutions or state officials – was not rejected registration. At the same time, among the persons whose registration was rejected, there were UDF representatives and other independent candidates.

Pre-schedule agitation

The observers of the BHC recorded numerous facts of pre-schedule agitation for candidates well before their registration. The methods of such agitation were all kinds of meetings with labour collectives, residents of dwelling settlements, holding citizens' receptions on various problems, and publication of articles in state-owned mass media.

Alexander Antonenko, Chair of the Grodno City Executive Committee (Grodno- Zanyoman Constituency No.49), had a meeting with Grodno residents in the premises of Housing-Operation Service No.20, located in the territory of the constituency, where Antonenko was going to get registered. The meeting was presented as a meeting with the residents of the city. However, residents themselves asserted that they could not remind Antonenko ever using this form of contacts with citizens during his all ruling period in the city.

On August 1, 2008, long before registration in Schuchin Constituency No.60, a meeting took place with Maria Biryukova, Deputy Chair of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee, who was nominated a candidate in this Constituency. The meeting took place in Schuchin with employees of the Central District Hospital and the OJSC "Vasylishki". The newspaper

"Zarya" No.61, on August 5, 2008, published information about M. Biryukova in the article entitled "Worthy People Should Be in Parliament!" However, as a candidate M. Biryukova was registered only in the third decade of August.

According to the information of BHC observers, state-owned papers all the time well before registration of candidates published materials, which could be regarded as agitation. The newspaper "Zarya" (No.92, 19.08.2008) placed another expanded material about the incumbent Deputy of the Parliament from Brest-Western Constituency No.1 Oleg Velichko, who headed in the House of Representatives the commission on health care, physical culture, family and youth matters. The article "Oleg Velichko: Be Able to See Perspective... " has tendentiously panegyric character. "Today, this man is surely known to all the country..." writes the author. "He keeps his eyes on those spheres of our life, which concern in fact every citizen. " The "Brestskaya Gazeta" (No.34, 22.08.2008) in its rubric "Most Valuable" also placed material dedicated to O. Velichko entitled "In Charge of Life of People. " An interview with O. Velichko entitled "Power of Laws – to Peoples' Service" ("Vecherni Brest" No.58, 18.07.2008) covered an essential area of a paper page, placed a photo of the Deputy sized 11 x 13 cm and had a character of a report to electorate. "During four years of my work in the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, I managed to do quite a lot, " the Deputy asserted. "...All the adopted laws were watched by MPs from viewpoint of peoples' interests. " In his interview, O. Velichko gave assessment to the strategy of Belarusian opposition at the elections. A similar material with a portrait entitled "Oleg Velichko: Be Wanted By People" was published in the newspaper "Brestskiy Vestnik" (No.30, 24.07.2008), in the issue dedicated to the holiday of the city. The Deputy informed his voters about his participation in reconstruction of the branch of City Hospital and improvement of the streets of the city.

A newspaper of the Grodno District named "Perspective" (No.58, 31.07.2008) published a large article about Nikolai Gorbochonok, first secretary of the Grodno District BRYU Committee, whose initiative group for collecting subscriptions was registered by the commission of Grodno Rural Electoral Constituency No.52 in the number of 116 persons.

The district newspaper "Naviny Kamyanechchiny" (23.07.2008) published, within the united day of informing the population, an article "Housing Construction Is Topmost Priority of State Policy". It reports about the meetings on July 17 of the propaganda group of the Kamenets District Executive Committee with employees of the Kamenets Construction RUE "PMK-14", which was attended by Nikolai Andraichuk,

candidate from the power, whose initiative group was registered on that date – 23.07.2008.

The newspaper of the Brest City Executive Committee “Brestskiy Vestnik” published an expanded article with sub-title “Person in His Place”, dedicated to Anna Anischuk, Director of Gymnasium No.6 of the city of Brest (No.29, 17.07.2008). Later, Ms Anischuk’s initiative group was registered.

In Baranovichi, on 26.07.2008, the channel of local television “Intex” broadcast in the “News” programme performance of Svetlana Pisch, Director General of the OJSC “Grant-Service”, a would-be candidate for Deputy in Baranovichi-Eastern Constituency No.6. The television programme demonstrated S. Pisch in the course of presenting TV-sets to families with many children.

Along with that, back in the course of nomination of candidates, oppositional press was also disseminated, where articles were published about the figures of the opposition, who were later nominated as candidates. For example, in Brest, during the stage of nominating candidates, activists of the PCB and BSDP (H) repeatedly disseminated independent press – newspapers “Tovarisch” (Comrade) and “Novy Chas” (New Time). The Brest regional branch of the Independent Trade Union of Radio and Electronic Industries (known as “REP”) disseminated their bulletins “Factory Gate House” and “Express-Info”, which contained similar materials. However, circulations of state-owned editions was incomparably higher that circulations of oppositional editions.

III. FORMATION OF PRECINCT ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS (PECS)

In accordance with Article 28 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, the preparation and holding the elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives shall be ensured by the constituency and precinct electoral commissions.

According to Article 34 of the Electoral Code, the precinct electoral commissions for elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives shall be formed by District and City Executive Committees, and in cities with division into city districts – by local administrations, in the number of 5–19 persons not later than 45 days before the date of elections.

The decisions on forming commissions with indication of their composition (membership), location and telephone numbers, shall be placed, within seven days, in the press or otherwise made known to citizens (voters).

Outside the Republic of Belarus, when holding elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives, precinct commissions are formed by heads of diplomatic representative offices (consular establishments) of the Republic of Belarus, which operate in the territory of respective foreign countries.

The procedure of nominating candidates for precinct electoral commissions is regulated by Article 35 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus. According to this Article, political parties, other public associations, and labour collectives of organizations or collectives of their structural subdivisions from among their members, as well as citizens through signing-in, can nominate only one candidate each into the respective precinct commission.

The following entities shall have the right to nominate their candidates for precinct commissions:

- Governing bodies of regional, Minsk city, district, town (urban) (in cities of regional subordination) and city district organizational structures of political parties and other public associations, which have their subordinate (lower-level) organizational structures;
- Governing bodies of town (urban) (in cities of district subordinations) organizational structures of political parties and other public associations, which have their subordinate (lower-level) organizational structures, and meetings of the primary organizations. A primary organization of a political party or other public association shall have the right to nominate its candidate to the precinct commission of that precinct, in the territory of which this primary organization is located;

- Meetings (conferences) of the entities, located in the territory of the district, city, city district, settlement, and labour collectives with the number of at least 30 workers – for the respective constituency commissions.

Where candidates for commissions are nominated by collectives of structural subdivisions, no nomination by the whole labour collective of the organization for these commissions shall be made. The meeting shall be competent, when attended by over one half of the collective. Conferences of labour collectives shall be held, if convocation of a meeting is difficult because of a great number of workers, work in many shifts or territorial spread of structural subdivisions; the conferences shall be competent, if attended by at least two thirds of the delegates elected in the order, established by the labour collective. The decision of the meeting (conference) of a labour collective shall be passed by the majority of votes of its participants. Candidates for precinct commissions can also be nominated by labour collectives or collectives of their structural subdivisions, which have at least 10 workers.

The right to nominate candidates for precinct electoral commissions also belongs to citizens, who have suffrage, by means of submitting an application.

When nominating a candidate for a precinct electoral commission for electing Deputies of the House of Representatives, the application shall be signed by at least 10 citizens, who live in the territory of this precinct.

The bodies, which form commissions, shall have the right to include their representatives into these commissions.

According to the Calendar Plan of organizational measures to prepare and hold elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the 4th convocation, the nomination of candidates for precinct commissions was possible till August 10, 2008, inclusive. Formation of precinct commissions should be over not later than August 13, 2008. Within seven days, local mass media were to publish the lists of members of precinct electoral commissions.

Nomination for members of precinct electoral commissions

According to Nikolai Lozovik, Secretary of the Central Commission for Elections and Republic's Referendums, in total 73,576 persons were nominated for members of 6485 precinct electoral commissions. More than half of the candidates – 37,936 persons – were nominated in the civil manner of submitting applications; labour collectives nominated 24,144 candidates, political parties – 1237 and public associations –10,259 persons.

Among political parties, most candidates for members of precinct commissions were nominated by the Party of Communists Belarusian – 425 persons. The United Civil Party nominated 344 candidates, the Party of the BPF – 201, Communist Party of Belarus – 195, and Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada) – 70 persons. One representative for members of precinct electoral commissions was nominated Agrarian Party and Republic's Party of Labour and Justice (RPLJ) each. Thus, representatives of political parties made 1.7% of all nominees to precinct commission, 84.1% of them represented oppositional parties.

Among public associations, most candidates we nominated by the Belarusian Republic's Youth Union – 2518 persons, "Belaya Rus" nominated 1817 candidates, Belarusian Union of Women – 1051, Belarusian Public Association of Veterans – 612, Belarusian Union of Officers – 60, and BPF "Revival" – 113 persons.

The public and political subjects-members of the UDF nominated 1515 persons for members of precinct commissions: candidates were nominated both directly at sittings of the organizational units (structures) and through citizens' signing-in (collection of subscriptions). In the latter case, according to decision of the UDF, applications about nomination for members of precinct commissions through citizens' signing-in indicated the partisan belonging of candidates.

Observers noted that in the course of nominating candidates to precinct commissions, all the interested persons had a chance to submit all the required documents. Along with that, facts were registered of pressure on the nominees into commissions by administrations of enterprises and education establishments with the aim to force them to recall their applications.

Formation outcomes

Formation of precinct electoral commissions (PECs) was even less transparent than formation of constituency electoral commissions (CoECs). Sittings of District Executive Committees and District Administrations (in cities split into districts) were often (mostly) closed for public. Representatives of nongovernmental organizations, independent mass media were not admitted to these sittings, and the candidates nominated for members of precinct commissions were never invited.

The observers from the BHC R. Yurgel, M. Voron, A. Yanushkevich, S. Rudkovskaya were not allowed by administrations of the Leninskiy and Oktiabrskiy Districts of Grodno to be present at the sittings where precinct

electoral commissions were formed. This situation was marked by the monitoring participants also in other Districts of the Grodno Region.

Observers were rejected information even about the time and place of sittings of Executive Committees. Multiple telephone calls made by Dmitri Slutskiy (Grodno-Northern Electoral Constituency No.51) to the administration of the Leninskiy District of Grodno with request to tell the date and hour of the respective sitting were answered that there was no such information by then. It had continued till the moment, when the administration reported that the sitting had already been held. Oleg Belinskiy, head of the administration’s office, only advised the members of the monitoring to read the newspaper “Grodzenskaya Pravda”, where the list of all precinct commissions was to be published.

In Mosty Electoral Constituency No.56, participants of the monitoring Lyavon Karpovich, Oleg Ramashkevich and Anatoly Valyuk also failed to learn the date and time of the administration’s sitting. The monitoring participants in Grodno noted that sittings lasted for a very short time, with no discussion of the nominees for members of commissions. Information about the number of such nominees was absolutely closed.

On August 12, sittings were held by the Soligorsk, Slutsk, Kletsk and Nesvizh District Executive Committees on the issue of formation of precinct commissions. The observers from the BHC had submitted well in advance their written applications to Executive Committees asking to admit them to these sittings. Observer Oleg Nikulin who was admitted to the sitting of the Kletsk District Executive Committee, asked, some 15 minutes after the start, to give him a chance to get acquainted with protocols (minutes) and applications about nomination for members of commissions. Immediately after that, the sitting of the Kletsk District Executive Committee was announced closed, and the observer was removed. Observer Kazimir Kavetskiy was not admitted to the sitting of the Soligorsk District Executive Committee. He was also refused the book of remarks and proposals, where he wanted to write down his complaint against illegal actions of the officials. Mr Kavetskiy addressed his written statement to the Public Prosecutor of the Soligorsk District, where he demanded the latter to react. Observer Vladimir Poklonskiy was rejected, at the Nesvizh District Executive Committee, any information about the date and hour of holding the sitting of the Executive Committee on formation of precinct electoral commissions. As he managed to learn later, the sitting of the Nesvizh District Executive Committee took place on August 12. Similarly, observer Vital Amyalkovich was not informed about the date, place and hour of the sitting of the Slutsk District Executive Committee. Moreover, while he was on August 12 in the

building of the Slutsk District Executive Committee and learning that in one of the rooms a sitting is held of the District Executive Committee on formation of precinct commissions, he asked to tell him the room number, however, he was refused. Already after the end of the sitting, V. Amyalkovich asked to inform him with information about the personal membership of formed precinct commissions. To this he was told that his competence as an observer from the NHRPA "BHC" covered only the actions of the Slutsk constituency electoral commission, where he was registered as an observer, while decisions and actions of the District Executive Committee are beyond his prerogative. He was explained that he could learn about the membership of precinct commissions from local mass media.

This tendency was also observed during sittings of District Executive Committees in the Gomel Region. No observers were admitted to the sittings of the Svetlogorsk, Zhlobin and Rogachov District Executive Committees, which took place on August 12. The officials of the Executive Committee recommended the observers to get acquainted with the outcomes of forming commissions in the local press. They were also refused of their right to get acquainted with the documents (nomination minutes), related to nomination of members of precinct electoral commissions. Officials of the District Executive Committees advised the observers to submit their request in writing in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Citizens' Applications".

Observer Nikolai Ulasevich was denied of attending the sitting of the Ostrovets District Executive Committee on August 11, where the members of precinct electoral commissions were approved, and after the meeting – of acquainting with the minutes and applications of candidates for nomination as members of commissions. On August 12, Deputy Chair of the District Executive Committee V. Svila explained that the Ostrovets District Executive Committee did not find it reasonable to invite representatives of political parties and public associations to its sitting.

Practically all the sittings of District Executive Committees and administrations were of formal character and were held with no real discussion of the candidates, nominated for precinct commissions. In fact, the sittings just formally approved the earlier compiled lists of precinct electoral commissions.

Observer Victor Dashkevich, who was admitted to the sitting of the Kopyl District Executive Committee, fixed that the Executive Committee formed the precinct electoral commissions within 15 minutes: it means that the Chair of the District Executive Committee just offered to vote for already prepared list. There was no consideration of applications on nomination for members

of precinct commissions, and no applications were announced. The observer asked to get acquainted with the minutes or applications on nomination; however, he was denied that. Then, the sitting of the Executive Committee was over.

The observer managed to find out that 29 persons in 8 precinct electoral commissions had got there illegally, since they were not members of those labour collectives, which had nominated them into commissions. This fact was confirmed by a prosecutor's check. However, even after that, the Executive Committee refused to acquaint observers with the nomination materials; and these persons continued to work in commissions.

The sitting of the Lida District Executive Committee on formation of precinct electoral commissions, where L. Anatsko, observer from the BHC, was present, took place from 2:30 to 4:10 p.m. In total, the Executive Committee received 1035 applications on nomination for members of the commissions of Lida Electoral Constituency No.54. Thus, consideration of each application by the Executive Committee took 5.7 seconds. At unanimous voting, 951 persons were approved as members of precinct the commission of this constituency.

The observers, who were admitted to the sittings of administrations of the Leninskiy and Moskovskiy Districts of Brest, as well as of the Pruzhany and Kamenets District Executive Committees, evidenced that the sitting lasted for 10-15 minutes, there was no discussion of the candidates for the members of commissions, the lists thereof were prepared well in advance ad approved unanimously.

At precinct polling station No.62 of Mukhovets Electoral Constituency No.4, 13 applications were submitted. Pyotr Andryevich, a member of the PBPF, who was nominated through collection of subscriptions and whose application was registered at No.1, was not included into the commission with formulation "not enough places". At the precinct polling station No.65 of the same constituency, 15 applications were submitted. Vladimir Malei, a human rights defender, whose application was also registered at No.1, was also not included into the commission. The Executive Committee explained that the decision to restrict the number of members of precinct electoral commissions was caused by "the aim to save money".

Most of the participants of the monitoring remark that the composition of precinct electoral commissions is in much same as the composition of the precinct commissions, which operated during the elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the 3rd convocation in 2004.

When comparing the lists of members of precinct commissions of Borisov Rural Electoral Constituency No.63, it became evident that out

of 565 approved members of commissions, 157 persons were members of precinct commissions in 2004. In Borisov City Constituency No.62, the match is 52% among the chairs of precinct commissions: out of 46 this-time chairs, 24 took this position during the 2004 elections. The composition of the Yurievo PEC of the Smolevichi constituency was practically the same, despite the fact that at that moment the prosecutor's office was holding a check on the application about opening a criminal case about falsification of elections to local soviets in 2007.

The trend survived, typical for previous election campaigns, to form commissions under the so-called "factory" principle, from representatives of one and the same labour collective under formally different ways of nominating members of these precinct commissions. As a rule, the chair of such commission is a person, to whom other members of the commission are subordinates by their labour relations. For example, out of 15 members of PEC No.1 in Polotsk City Electoral Constituency, 14 persons were employees of the LLC "Polotsk-Shklovalakno" (the fifteenth member of the commission, nominated from the CPB, was a lady-pensioner, who was once one of the merited weavers of that very "Shklovalakno"). All the members of this commission were nominated by structural subdivisions of the LLC "Polotsk-Shklovalakno". The chair of the commission was director deputy for ideological work; and his chair in the commission was director of the Palace of Culture, where the polling station was organized; the secretary of the commission was a journalist of the small-circulation newspapers "Trudovaya Smena", dependent on the administration of the enterprise.

The practice was widespread, when chairs of commissions were school directors, while teachers made the overwhelming majority in all "pre-school" commissions.

The total number of persons who were members of precinct electoral commissions made 69,845 persons. Of them, 36,071 were nominated by citizens through submitting applications, 21,869 – by labour collectives, 9032 – by public associations, 2712 – by bodies, which form commission, and only 161 persons represented political parties. The precinct commission included 116 representatives of the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB), 3 – of the Patriotic Party, 1 – of the Agrarian Party, and 1 – of the Republic's Party of Labour and Justice. Out of oppositional political parties, the precinct commissions included 29 representatives of the Party of Communists Belarusian (PCB), 7 – of the United Civil Party (UCP), and 4 – of the Party of the BPF (PBPF).

As to the total number of representatives of all public-political subjects, which are members of the UDF, only a scanty part of them was included into

precinct commission: 48 out of 1515 candidates, which makes 3.1%. Thus, out of the total number of persons who became members of precinct electoral commissions, representatives democratic forces made only 0.07%. This figure is even smaller that the number of representatives of democratic forces in precinct commissions at the previous parliamentary elections in 2004 (0.2%).

It is worth noting that many representatives of democratic forces were approved as members of precinct commissions of the closed polling stations (in hospitals, military units, sanatoriums, dispensaries, etc.).

The precinct electoral commissions (PECs) are the most important structures in the election process: they are in charge of vote tabulation by ballot papers, other commissions are summing up the figures from PEC minutes. It should be noted that the authorities failed to do the required steps for forming independent PECs, which could win the trust of the voters and observers.

In many cases the PEC formation process remained non-transparent, and representatives of broad public were not allowed to be present at the sittings of the bodies, which are forming such commissions.

In the course of considering proposals on inclusion into commissions, Executive Committees were actually approving the earlier compiled lists without any analysis and discussion of nominated candidates.

The lack of criteria, defined by the law, of inclusion of candidates into commissions, combined with the procedures of forming them, allows the bodies, in charge of forming them, to manipulate the membership of commissions.

The precinct electoral commissions were formed practically with no account of the interests of the opposition, which fails to make sufficient guarantees of their independence from the bodies, which had formed them.

IV. AGITATION

Observers remark that the elections were poorly covered by state-owned mass media. The materials about the election campaign consisted mainly of official information or hidden/frank agitation for pro-governmental candidates. No lively discussions, publicist polemics or dialogue were observed among Belarusian society on the eve of the elections to the supreme legislative body of the country.

In the period of agitation, the country held the united day of political information on the topic: “Public-and-political and social-and-economic situation in Belarus on the eve of parliamentary elections”. The materials to the united day of political information, placed in the websites of state-owned bodies, emphasized the importance of parliamentary elections for the country. The assessment of representatives of the opposition and their activities was composedly negative (rather low rating of representatives of the opposition among the population was indicated). The main emphasis was given to the factor of stability continuity in the country.

Official papers published decisions of local power bodies “On definition of sites for placement of pre-election materials to the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus” and “On allocation of premises for meetings of candidates for Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus with voters”.

According to assessment of observers, in most of the regions the sites defined for placement of agitation materials failed to provide sufficient opportunities for agitation for candidates. One single “official” site per precinct was not enough, and for using the area of shops, enterprises and institutions, it was necessary to coordinate with the heads thereof, which also complicated the process of pre-electoral agitation.

According to reports of the observers in Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1 and Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3, the sites for placement of agitation materials, the list of which was approved on 21.08.2008 by the Administrations of the Leninskiy and Moskovskiy Districts of Brest, were in fact polling stations)one additional site, was, as a rule, allocated in a shop). This situation essentially restricted the rights of candidates for deputies even in comparison with elections of 2004, since then, the decisions of administrations had a provision running that upon consent of heads of enterprises and organizations is was allowed placing agitation of materials in the territories of these enterprises and organizations. In decisions of 2008, this provision was absent.

In Slutsk Electoral Constituency No. 74, the list of sites for placing of agitation products, published in the newspaper «Slutski Krai» (22.08.2008), included the following: 3 information boards, 10 information poster pillars, information stands in the polling stations and others. However, some of the information boards and pillars listed in the newspaper did not exist by the start of agitation already for several years: for example, the information board at 129 Sotsialisticheskaya Street and the information pillar in the same street at No. 116 and others.

In a number of dwelling settlements of Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No. 8 (villages of Kamenets, Vysokoe, Dmitrovichi, Vidomlya and others), at polling stations, observers failed to find a single specially equipped information stand. The statement of the Kamenets District Executive Committee of 19.08.2008 has no list of institutions and organizations, which have such stands. To the request of Valentin Lazarenkov, candidate for Deputy in Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No. 8, neither the chair, nor the members of the constituency electoral commission and nor the official of the District Executive Committee I. Nigerysh could particularly show the sites in the Constituency, where such equipped stands were available.

Allocation of premises for candidates' meetings with voters

In many cases, allocation of rooms for candidates' meetings with voters could not allow candidates to launch a broad campaign of meetings with voters.

In Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No. 14, three places were allocated for candidates' meetings with voters, which are situated in fact in the centre of the city (City House of Culture (CHC) cinema «Peramoga» (Victory) and House of Culture (HC) «Trykatazhnik»). Not a single place for the meetings was allocated in such densely populated districts of the city, like the Western Micro-District, Albrekhtovo, the area of the Rokossovskogo and Kleschova Streets, as well as in the area of the City Hospital and park. By observers' estimates, this way of allocation could be a real obstacle for candidates' meetings with their voters. Besides, two premises, allocated for meetings in Pinsk Rural Electoral Constituency No. 15, were situated not far from the borders of Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No. 14, which also could complicate the pre-electoral agitation.

In Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No. 1, the Brest City Executive Committee approved 15 places for candidates' meetings with voters, mainly, schools. This could not form sufficient conditions for holding full-fledged

agitation among more than 60,000 voters. Besides, the decision of the Executive Committee indicates that the meetings with voters, which are organized outside the above places, should be held in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Mass Actions" and Statement of the Brest City Executive Committee of October 25, 2006, No.1715 "On Defining Permanent Places for Holding Mass Actions in Brest City". As a result, the only place for candidates' meetings with voters of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, apart from the above 15 places, was the "Locomotive" Stadium. However, it is located in the territory of another Electoral Constituency.

Facts of hidden agitation through state-owned mass media

State-owned mass media obviously worked in favour of pro-governmental candidates. The candidates from the opposition could only publish their programmes in media, which is directly envisioned by the EC. The public and political newspaper "Slutski Krai" was systematically publishing panegyric articles about the activity of Inessa Klyaschuk, first secretary of the Slutsk City Committee of the BRYU (29.07.2008, 12 and 25.08.2008, 2 and 19.09.2008). The materials began appearing before the moment of official registration of Ms Klyaschuk as a candidate in Slutsk Electoral Constituency No.74. The observers filed complaints against the editorial board of the newspaper to the Slutsk District Executive Committee on the facts of agitation prior to official registration. In was responded by the Slutsk City Executive Committee that no violations of the electoral legislation were revealed in these cases.

The public and political newspaper of the Brest Region "Zarya" (No.84, 31.07.2008) placed, under the rubric "Managing is not just flourishing arms", a large publication entitled "Love People – and You'll Get Tribute" about Zinaida Mandrovskaya, Director of the Production Unitary Enterprise (PUE) "ElKis" of the Republic's Public Association "BelTIZ" and candidate for Deputy in Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No.14. Being a Deputy of the City Soviet of Deputies, Ms Mandrovskaya often figured in editor's pages of local press, for instance, in the article about the arrival of the delegation of the Krasnogvardeiskiy District of St Petersburg to Pinsk ("Pinski Vesnik", No.66, 26.08.2008), about greeting the workers of trade ("Pinski Vesnik", No.58, 29.07.2008). At the beginning of school year, the newspapers "Pinski Vesnik" (Nos. 67 and 68) and "Polesskaya Pravda" (No.71) were regularly covering Z. Mandrovskaya's activities in the sphere of education: her speech at the city assembly of teachers, participation in opening of the City Mother's

Museum; she was depicted as a candidate for deputy. As reported by observers, at the city assembly of teachers, the managers of the city department of education urged the audience to support Z. Mandrovskaya at the elections. Her opponents – Evgeniy Perats, a candidate from the PCB, and independent candidate Valentin Ulasyuk were in inferior competitive conditions.

The public and political newspaper of the Pinsk District "Polesskaya Pravda" (No.61, 06.08.2008) in rubric "People of Polesye Land" published an article about Konstantin Shevchik, a would-be candidate in Pinsk Rural Constituency No.15. The whole block of materials about the activities of the employees of the trust OJSC "Pinskvodkhozstroy", headed by K. Shevchik, entitled "Live to Build, and Build to Live" published on that very day in newspaper "Zarya" (No.88, 09.09.2008). At the stage of pre-electoral agitation, the newspapers "Pinski Vesnik" and "Polesskaya Pravda" published huge materials, dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the trust "Pinskvodkhozstroy", most of half of them were covering the activity of Konstantin Shevchik, Director General of the trust and the sole candidate for Deputy in Pinsk Rural Electoral Constituency No.15.

The newspaper "Slonimskiy Vestnik" (12.08.2008) published in its front page a material about Mechislav Kastsyuk, Chair of the Slonim District Executive Committee and candidate for Deputy in Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58, who was shown in the process of awarding money premiums harvester operators. M. Kastsyuk was also figuring in the pages of the newspapers "Slonimskiy Vestnik" (13.08.2008) and "Gazeta Slonimskaya" (20.08.2008) on the occasion of opening in Slonim of the "Velcom" sales and servicing centre. Registration of M. Kastsyuk and I. Shega as candidates in Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58 was reported by the "Slonimskiy Vestnik" on 30.08.2008. The same issue gave report about the district pedagogical sitting with M. Kastsyuk's photo, who was congratulating teachers. Not long before that, the "Gazeta Slonimskaya" (27.08. 2008) published an article "Don't Make Good and You Won't Get Vice", about a complaint lodged by the invalids' community to Constituency Commission No.58 against Ivan Shega, the opponent of the Chair of the Slonim District Executive Committee. The article was of tendentiously negative character.

The Gantsevichi district newspaper "Soviet Polesye" (No.69, 30.08.2008) published in its front page a notice about registration of Leonid Kovalevich, Director General of the SUPE "Ivatsevichi HUS" and a candidate in Ivatsevichi Electoral Constituency No.11. L. Kovalevich remained the only candidate for Deputy, after his rival – Nikolai Navumik

from the Gantsevichi District – refused to take part in the elections. M. Navumik decided not to take his subscription lists from the constituency commission, having explained in a private talk that he was under pressure from the director of the fishery farm "Laktyshi" – the enterprise, where he worked.

After registration of L. Kovalevich as candidate in Ivatsevichi Electoral Constituency No.11, no activity was observed in the district.

From the end of July, the district newspaper "Miory News" started to actively write about Vladimir Skavarodka, a would-be candidate for Deputy in Miory Electoral Constituency No.24, Deputy of the House of Representatives. The newspaper "Dzvinskaya Prauda" (No.64, 1.08.2008) dedicated half of its issue to Mr Skavarodka and his authority among the residents of the Verkhnedvinsk District. Victor Shulga, opponent of the above candidate in Miory Electoral Constituency No.24, a candidate from the UCP, was in inferior competitive conditions.

In August, the "Orshanskaya Gazeta" published two articles by Deputy of the House of Representatives Vladimir Zhvikov, in which he emphasized the outstanding role of Vladimir Zharela, head of the Belarusian Railways in development of the Orsha railway node. On August 12, in the course of the "hotline" programme at local radio station "SKIF" V. Zharela promised to build in Orsha, before 2010 for the money of his agency, an ice palace. V. Zharela's opponent in Orsha City Electoral Constituency No.26, Vladimir Yurzhyts, a candidate from the UCP, was also unable, in the opinion of observers, to make any real alternative to the pro-governmental candidate.

On August 19, the Polotsk-based united newspaper "Polatski Vesnik" placed an announcement about performance at the FM-radio "Europe-Plus-Polotsk" of Pyotr Yuzhyk, Deputy Chair of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee, who only on August 18 submitted his documents to the constituency electoral commission for his registration as a candidate in Polotsk City Electoral Constituency No.28. The "Polatski Vesnik" placed information that the newspaper will publish the transcript of the radio programme with P. Yuzhyk. The regional newspaper "Narodnae Slova" published an interview with P. Yuzhyk covering almost a full page. The material asserts that through the efforts of the Deputy Chair of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee the Polotsk monuments of architecture – the Sofia Cathedral and St Transfiguration Church – were put into the list of UNESCO.

Long before the start of the agitation stage, state-owned mass media of Novopolotsk started placing materials about Inna Antonova, chief physician of children's polyclinic, a candidate in Novopolotsk Electoral

Constituency No.25. Her performances could be watched in the programme of local state television “Vector-TV” in rubric “Public reception Room”. The elections in this constituency were alternative-free.

A number of issues of the Chashniki district newspaper “Chyrvony Pramen” published materials about labour and organizational activities of Anfim Mikhalevich, Chair of the Chashniki District Executive Committee and a candidate for Deputy in Lepel Electoral Constituency No.23. However, the opponent of A. Mikhalevich – Tatiana Sadouskaya – was not mentioned in any of the publications.

In the period of pre-electoral agitation, mass media regularly published articles, which described negatively the activity of the power opponents as a whole. For example, the newspaper “Slonimskiy Vestnik” (No.107, 17.09.2008) placed a material entitled “Oppositional Parties Are Politically Bankrupt”. In the article “Paris’ Choice” (“Zarya” No.97, 30.08.2008) the names of particular candidates were not given, however, the names of the leaders were given, with whom this or that party is associated: Z. Paznyak, S. Shushkevich, A. Lebedska. The article “Step Back in Election Democratization”, published in the “Arshanskaya Gazeta” (25.09.2008) without indication of the author, is full of sharp attacks on the guidelines of the ODIHR of the OSCE, and others.

Agitation through state-owned mass media

Observers have noticed that certain pro-governmental candidates failed to use their chances of pre-electoral agitation through radio and television. In Molodechno Rural Electoral Constituency No.71, Vladimir Sinyakov, head of the Chief Department of Cadre Policy of Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus, refused to speak on radio and television. The newspaper “Molodechnenskaya Gazeta” (06.09.2008) published his electoral programme.

The observation evidenced that agitation in state-owned mass media was not always within the bounds of electoral legislation. Cases were fixed, when radio broadcasting of addresses of candidates for deputies to their voters were hampered of disrupted.

On September 9, in the course of radio broadcasting of the speech of Sergey Vaznyak, candidate in Senno Electoral Constituency No.30 and a member of PCB, radio receivers of the Vorontsevichi Rural Soviet and settlement of Usvizh-Buk of the Tolochin District were disconnected from the air. As a result of this, about one thousand voters were deprived of their chance to get acquainted with the programme of the PCB representative.

The CoEC of the Senno Electoral Constituency No.30, chaired by Vladimir Syrovatkin, refused to provide the applicant a repeated radio chance.

On September 5, in the course of television address of candidate for Deputy in Vitebsk-Railway Electoral Constituency A. Levinov, the sound disappeared for part of the time (the programme was recorded in advance). The address became “dumb” right when the candidate criticised power bodies.

In a number of regions when broadcasting television addresses of candidates, the observers noticed that candidates from the UDF and independent candidates read their texts from paper, while those supported by the power had a chance to use the so-called “prompter”, an electronic screen with the text installed in front of the speaker and unseen for the viewers. Naturally, the latter’s speeches had a more positive effect on the audience.

There were multiple cases of censoring of presentations and programmes of candidates for deputies.

Natalia Zaitseva, a candidate for Deputy in Mogilyov-October Electoral Constituency No.86, faced facts of censoring and editing of her agitation posters. Without her consent texts were amended: the information was deleted that the reason of Ms Zaitseva’s unemployment was Decree No.760, under which individual entrepreneurs were prohibited to employ anybody but their close relatives; the words “temporarily unemployed” were crossed out, same as the data about her father-veteran and grandfather who was underground fighter in the wartime. In the course of printing her materials at the private printing shop of Individual Entrepreneur (IE) Gardzienka, she was persistently urged to change the background colours of her poster from white-red into green. Most of the leaflets were made with great delay.

Elena Medvedeva, a candidate for Deputy in Bobruisk-Lenin Electoral Constituency No.78, faced the requirement to repeatedly confirm the facts of her biography published in her pre-election poster. Despite the documentary confirmations presented by her, Nikolai Plaksitskiy, Chair of the CoEC, did not agree making corrections as to the place of work of the candidate for Deputy. Only after the sanction of Alexander Markachov, head of the ideological division of the Bobruisk City Executive Committee, it became possible to correct the text of Ms Medvedeva’s biography.

The data of Mikhail Kavalkov, a candidate for Deputy in Bobruisk-Pervomai Electoral Constituency No.79, contained mistakes in biographical data, as well as wrong names of his place of work and position. In the opinion of M. Kavalkov, it cannot be excluded that mistakes were made deliberately, since Victor Gorbanyov, Chair of the CoEC, at the previous

elections revealed prejudged attitudes to independent and oppositional candidates. Only after M. Kavalkov's complaint to the CEC, his biography data was corrected.

Alexei Gavrutsikov, a candidate in Vitebsk-Chkalov Electoral Constituency No.18, was persistently urged by the editorial board of the newspaper "Vitsbichi" to remove from his pre-electoral programme his estimates of the appeals to early voting, as well as certain other publicist phrases. A. Gavrutsikov managed to defend his position only on the problem of early voting.

Employees of the Gorki District Executive Committee demanded from Andrei Yurkov, a candidate in Gorki Electoral Constituency No.81, to edit the text of his programme, delete the promises to solve social problems of the region, as well as to add to the biography that he was unemployed.

The programme of Leonid Orlov, a UCP member and a candidate in Mozyr Electoral Constituency No.42, after being published in the district newspaper "Zhytsyo Palesya", appeared to be essentially altered in comparison with the programme, as published in the leaflet and announced in television address: acute problems raised by L. Orlov and worrying the residents of the city of Mozyr, disappeared almost completely. On 19.09.2008, the CoEC of Mozyr Electoral Constituency No.42 made a decision to pass a written warning to candidate L. Orlov for his incorrect pre-electoral agitation. The consideration of the contents of the candidate's printed agitation products reduced to recognition by the members of the facts, narrated in the candidate's agitation materials. However, it was also recognized that social-economic problems of the region were impossible to be solved. Therefore, in the opinion of the members of the Mozyr CoEC, the criticism of local authorities by L. Orlov was unjustified.

In Slutsk Electoral Constituency No.74, in the course of printing agitation materials of candidate Anatoly Yurevich, attempts were undertaken by officials to delete from his agitation leaflets the appeal "Vote only on September 28!" The slogan, however, appeared in the pre-election agitation leaflets of A. Yurevich, but only after interference of Alexander Andrushkevich, Chair of the CoEC. In the course of preparation to recording of A. Yurevich's television address, an unknown person was present in the studio, who presented himself as a worker of the Belarusian TV and Radio Company. He asked to give him the text for review, and then asked to change it. The candidate for Deputy refused to make any changes.

Larissa Nasanovich, a candidate for Deputy in Soligorsk Electoral Constituency No.76, was refused publication of her agitation materials

in Soligorsk district newspaper “Shakhtsyor” (Miner). The situation was provoked by the fact that L. Nasanovich in her performance at Radio “Stalitsa” on 17.09.2008 informed the broad public about the actions committed for a long time by Olga Kaptsevitskaya, editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Shakhtsyor” of the Soligorsk District Executive Committee, which are qualified by a theft through abuse of one’s service position. The editor-in-chief was brought to criminal liability, however, was not dismissed and went on working and taking revenge on those who had complained against her. (The resonance of L. Nasanovich’s performance was the long-awaited dismissal of O. Kaptsevitskaya on the second day after the candidate’s speech on the radio.) The problem was settled after interference of Mikhail Yakimovich, Chair of the CoEC.

Obstacles to printing agitation materials

Quite often oppositional and independent candidates faced problems in printing and disseminating their own agitation products.

Vyacheslav Sheleg, a candidate in Osipovichi Electoral Constituency No.89, was refused by the RUE “A. T. Nepogodin Expanded Bobruisk Printing House” of printing his products; the enterprise unilaterally cancelled the contract. In a private conversation, one of the employees of the printing house told V. Sheleg that his bosses were forbidden to print products for independent and oppositional candidates. V. Sheleg’s materials were printed in Gomel with a delay.

Elena Medvedeva, a candidate in Bobruisk-Lenin Electoral Constituency No.78, ordered her agitation materials ў LLC “Image” of Bobruisk, where the pro-governmental candidates were then already printing their programmes. The order was documented and paid for. However, the head of the LLC “Image” told E. Medvedeva that because of that he was under threat of closing his company. Only after the candidate addressed to the Chair of the CoEC Nikolai Plaksitskiy and the interference of the latter the order was fulfilled.

Igor Kanygin, a candidate in Vitebsk-Railway Electoral Constituency No.19, ordered his agitation materials in a private printing house of Vitebsk. He could not make the payment, when he was telephoned that the higher bosses ordered the printers not to fulfil I. Kanygin’s order. The materials were printed in another place. However, the candidate already lost the time for his pre-electoral agitation.

Andrei Levinov, a candidate in the same Vitebsk-Railway Electoral Constituency No.19, was also refused a refusal to print the text of his address

to voters. A private printing house demanded from him a written coordination with the CoEC and removal from the address of certain acute theses. Candidate A. Levinov was forced to agree.

Anatol Lebedska, a candidate in Starovilenskaya Electoral Constituency No.105, Alexander Dobrovolskiy, a candidate in Svisloch Electoral Constituency No.94, Valentina Polevikova, a candidate in Kupala Electoral Constituency No.95, Alexander Bahdankevich, a candidate in Chkalov Electoral Constituency No.96, and Liudmila Gryaznova, a candidate in Partisan Electoral Constituency No.110, concluded agreements to publish their agitation materials in a special issue of the newspaper "Narodnaya Volya". The special issue was printed and disseminated among voters.

At the same time, some candidates from the opposition reported that their presentations were censored to the less extent than at the previous parliamentary elections. On 19.09.2008, the editorial board of the newspaper "Vecherni Brest" for the first time ever organized a roundtable with participation of all candidates for deputies from the city of Brest. The UDF candidate I. Maslovskiy noted that, prior to publish the materials of debates, the editors of the newspaper gave a chance to Mr Maslovskiy himself and candidate for Deputy A. Levkovich to get acquainted with the editorial editing. Both candidates from the UDF found that their speeches were no censored. The debates materials were published on 26.09.2008 with circulation of 30,000 copies.

Debates "by correspondence" of candidates for deputies were held by the non-governmental Baranovichi newspaper "Intex-Press" (No.38, 18.09.2008). However, Anatoly Vankovich, Deputy of the House of Representatives and candidate from the power in Baranovichi-Western Electoral Constituency No.5, refused to take part in the debates held by the newspaper.

Pressure on candidates and their teams

After registration in Bobruisk Rural Electoral Constituency No.80 of Ales Chygir, deputy editor-in-chief of the independent newspapers "Reklamny Courier", the editorial office of the newspapers was visited by two off-schedule revisions – from the Fund of Social Protection of Population and from the Belarusian State Insurance Company. No violations were found. However, the Ministry of Information passed two warnings to the newspaper under three articles of the Law "On Mass Media". The staff of the newspaper and the observers expressed the idea that the warnings were passed under formal grounds, and thus pressure was exerted on Ales Chygir, whose rival

in Bobruisk Rural Electoral Constituency No.80 was Anatoly Glaz, Deputy Chair of the Mogilyov Regional Executive Committee.

On September 10, in the course of agitation for Andrei Bandarenka, a candidate in Osipovichi Electoral Constituency No.89, conducted by Sergey Smantsar, a resident of the Klichev District, employees of the Klichev ROVD tried to confiscate the agitation materials. Candidate for deputy A. Bandarenka, managed to clear out, after arrival to the place of the incident, that the command to confiscate the agitation materials originated from the officials of the Klichev ROVD. On this fact, complaints were lodged to the CEC, MIA and Prosecutor's Office. The observers linked the prohibition on holding agitation in the Klichev District with the fact that another candidate in Osipovichi Electoral Constituency No.89 was Sergey Kryzhevich, Chair of the Klichev District Executive Committee.

Observers fixed numerous facts of unequal opportunities for placement of visual agitation materials.

As reported by entrepreneur T. Fursova, her shop, located in the city of Krichev, in the territory Krichev Electoral Constituency No.83, was visited by Liudmila Golovnyova, director of the branch of the OJSC "Belarusbank", who brought agitation materials in support of candidate Tamara Belkina and demanded to place them in prominent places. T. Belkina is the head of the division for ideological work of the State Logistics Institution of the Department of Affairs of the President of the Republic of Belarus. Having faced misunderstanding of shop assistants, L. Golovnyova on the following day sent Irina Prudnikova, head of the sector of trade and services of the division of economy, who again demanded to place T. Belkina's posters in shop-windows. In general, in the period of pre-electoral agitation, materials about T. Belkina in great amounts could be met in most crowded places.

The number of materials of Sergey Nerouny, a UCP member and opponent of T. Belkina, was much smaller. The resources of these two candidates, according to the observers, were in fact incomparable.

On September 1, Valentin Lazarenkov, a candidate in Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, addressed the managers of consuming cooperation shops, which make at least 80% of the total number of shops in the district, with a request to place his pre-election posters in their shops. Consequently, over 50 posters were placed. On September 8, while touring the constituency, V. Lazarenkov found out that only 3 posters survived. In answer to his request to explain this fact, V. Grytsuk, Chair of the CoEC of Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, said that the command to remove the posters in shops was given by an official of the Kamenets District

Executive Committee in accordance with the decision of the Executive Committee of 19.08.2008. A similar problem was confronted by Vasil Vavranyuk, another candidate in Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8. According to his story, after September 18 some villages and rural shops refused to place his agitation products.

Agitation by means of printed agitation materials was held in a number of constituencies with a broad usage of administrative resource. Multiple manipulations of the authorities were observed with the aim to set up unequal condition of pre-electoral competition. Pro-governmental candidates had all opportunities to place their pre-election posters in crowded public places – shops, state-owned establishments and enterprises.

In the period of agitation, numerous facts were observed, which could be treated as unequal terms for holding the agitation campaign.

On August 27, in the territory of the Plant of Mass Tires of the OJSC “Belshina” pre-election posters of Vladimir Karpyak, Chief Engineer of this very Plant, appeared. As of August 27, V. Karpyak was not yet registered as a candidate in Bobruisk-Pervomai Electoral Constituency No.79.

In Grodno-Northern Electoral Constituency No.51, managers of shops, pharmacies and post-offices, where agitation posters of the candidate from the power Marina Remsha were placed in the centralized order, only after lengthy consultations with their bosses agreed to place also the respective posters of Yaroslav Romanchuk. While the administration of the market named “Corona” refused to provide Ya. Romanchuk with such an opportunity, referring to the necessity for the headquarters of Ya. Romanchuk was obliged to present a special permit from the Administration of the Leninskiy District of GrodNo.

Igor Kavalyonak, a candidate in Mogilyov-Lenin Electoral Constituency No.84, was not allowed to place his agitation posters in the store “Euroset” and in cafe “Salominka” of Mogilyov, although the posters of another candidate – Vladimir Vasylyonok, head of one of the divisions of the OJSC “Mogilyovkhimvalakno”, were already present there.

The shop of Syalets village of the Mogilyov District, located in the territory of Mogilyov Rural Electoral Constituency No.88, refused to place a poster of candidate Vladimir Novikov, under the motive that a permit of their bosses is required. However, the poster of his opponent – Alexander Razgonov, Chair of the Mogilyov District Executive Committee – was already placed there on a stand.

Observers fixed multiple cases, when in the course of early elections, polling stations had no posters with information about certain candidates whatsoever. For example, at polling stations of Minsk-Eastern Electoral

Constituency No.107, only posters with general information about all the candidates could be seen. Polling stations Nos. 28 and 39 lacked agitation materials on candidate Vitaly Busko, while polling station No.17 lacked any agitation about candidate Victor Kavalchuk. However, posters of candidate Eduard Kuznetsov, deputy chief of the OJSC "Belagroprombank", could be seen everywhere.

Election agents of Anatoly Levkovich, a candidate in Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1 and Chair of the BSDP (H), where refused, in many places of the constituency (shops, pharmacies), from placing agitation materials. At the same time, the materials of his opponent Oleg Velichko were present almost everywhere. The administration of the "Central Marketplace" of the city of Brest also refused to provide place to candidate A. Levkovich. At the meeting on 13.09.2008 of the candidate for Deputy with D. Glushinskiy, Director of the "Central Marketplace", in the course of which A. Levkovich indicated the presence of agitation materials of another candidate, Director of the marketplace agreed to place A. Levkovich's posters. However, none of the posters, left by the UDF candidate from in sufficient quantity, ever appeared in the Brest city marketplace. On 14.09.2008, A. Levkovich orally addressed G. Zhuk, Chair of the CoEC of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, and asked her to interfere into the situation. However, Chair Ms Zhuk failed to ensure equal terms for running agitation in her constituency. On 15.09.2008, A. Levkovich sent his written complaints to the CoEC, CEC and observers from the OSCE and CIS.

The editorial board of the public and political newspaper "Vecherni Brest" refused to publish the pre-election programme of Anatoly Levkovich, referring to violation in it of Article 47 of the Electoral Code (EC), according to which agitation pre-election materials and speeches of candidates should not contain insults and slander in relation to officials and other candidates for deputies. In the opinion B. Pavlovskiy, deputy editor-in-chief of the "Vecherni Brest", the following phrases from the programme of A. Levkovich are covered by Article 47 of the EC and abuse another candidate: "I ask my competitor A. Velichko: Whose will did you fulfil when you voted for cancellation of social preferences of millions of Belarusian citizens? Have you advised with your voters?" This approach in assessing the pre-electoral polemics is seriously restricting the opportunities to criticize incumbent Parliamentarians both by the voters and other candidates for Deputy's mandates.

As remarked by observers, in Brest, pre-election posters of A. Levkovich, a UDF candidate for Deputy in Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, were practically every day stuck over with labels inscribed "Boycott". His posters were frequently damaged.

Practically all the pre-election posters of Igor Maslovskiy, a candidate in Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3, were damaged. I. Maslovskiy submitted an application to the Moskovskiy ROVD of Brest (copies – to the CoEC and OSCE observers) with a demand to bring the offenders to responsibility, and take the necessary measures to prevent similar facts, However, no results followed.

In the period of agitation, in many regions of Belarus, observers fixed printed materials, which called to boycott the elections. For example, in post boxes of Baranovichi residents leaflets appeared of the Public Initiatives "Belarusian Solidarity in Support of Position of Conservative-Christian Party of BPF", where the basic motives where: "Nobody to false elections!"; "Ignoring elections id a blow on plans of regime and Muscovites". In the territory of Brest issues of the newspaper "Tovarisch" were actively disseminated, in Baranovichi and Baranovichi District – bulletins "Human Rights Defender" and "Rights to Choose" with information about the election campaign.

Agitation through holding meetings with voters

In the course of the election campaign, not many candidates from the power made use of such form of agitation, like agitation through holding meetings with voters.

In certain regions, observers noted critically low activity of power nominees at meetings with voters.

According to observers, the power nominees (pro-governmental candidates) had no problems in organizing the meetings. In Slutsk Electoral Constituency No.74, the candidate for Deputy Inessa Klyaschuk, First Secretary of the Slutsk City Committee of the BRYU, had her meetings, but her opponent – Anatoly Yurevich, a member of the BSDP (H), – had problems. For example, Vladimir Nauras, chief physician of the Central District Hospital, who was election agent of I. Klyaschuk, on 11.09.2008 organized two meetings with her in the premises of his hospital. At none of them he allowed A. Yurevich to speak to the audience. A similar situation was observed on 18.09.2008 at the parents' meeting in Secondary School No.13 of Slutsk. Only as a result of persistent demands of the parents present, Director of the School Mikhail Sakavets gave the floor to A. Yurevich. The meeting of A. Yurevich with the employees of the Slutsk branch of the OJSC "Belagroprombank" failed because the Slutsk District Executive Committee had warned the bank managers about "responsibility" for organization of meetings with the oppositional candidate.

Not a single application out of six submitted to enterprises and institutions by the headquarters of Yaroslav Romanchuk, a candidate from the UCP in Grodno-Northern Electoral Constituency No.51, was satisfied. The administration of the Combine of Building Materials referred to repairs of the conference hall; directorate of the meat-packing plant – to the regime status of the object; bosses of the Palace of Culture "Yunatstva" (Youth) returned the application with a notice on the envelope that the addressee did not exist; directorate of the "Corona" marketplace motivated their refusal by absence of the place fit for a meeting; direction of Secondary School No.23 motivated the refusal by ball-room dancing; enterprise "Radyokhvalya" (Radio Wave) motivated the refusal by the emergency status of the conference hall. At the same time, local authorities organized meetings for Marina Remsha, the pro-governmental candidate in this very constituency, for example, in that very Combine of Building Materials, as well as in the Grodno State Agrarian University.

The meeting with Elena Shamal, a candidate for Deputy in Bobruisk-Lenin Electoral Constituency No.78, with the labour collective of the Pervomai Branch of the "Belpromstrojbank" took place during work hours, that is, on September 1 at 4 p.m. At the same time another candidate in this constituency Vladimir Syamashka, who learnt about the meeting from the announcement on the entrance door of the bank, was not admitted to the meeting by manager Anton Mironov. V. Syamashka addressed his complaint on the fact of breaking equal terms for candidates to the CoEC and prosecutor's office.

The meeting with Sergey Syamashka, Deputy of the House of Representatives and a candidate in Vitebsk-Railway Electoral Constituency No.19, took place on September 3 at the parents' meeting in Gymnasium No.4 of Vitebsk, in the course of which S. Syamashka was sitting in the presidium. Despite the presence in the room of candidate A. Levinov, he was not given the floor. In a private conversation, Director of the Gymnasium explained to A. Levinov that "he was telephoned and asked" not to give the floor to S. Syamashka's opponent. Andrei Levinov was refused in Secondary School No.2, OJSC "Vitebsk Instrument Factory" and ROVD of Zheleznodorozhny District of Vitebsk.

Leonid Nevar, a candidate in Rechitsa Electoral Constituency No.44, having learnt that the administration of the RUE "Rechitsa Hardware Plant" was organizing on September 17 a meeting of employees of the enterprise with candidate Alla Isachenko, head of the financial division of the Rechitsa District Executive Committee, expressed his intention to take part in the meeting and came to the territory of the enterprise. Unknown persons in

civilian clothes wouldn't let him in. Director of the enterprise Adam Vashkov offered L. Nevar to file an application, and promised to give an answer within three days and appoint the date and time of the meeting. However, no answer was ever given, and candidate L. Nevar was denied meetings in most of the places, where local authorities used to organize pre-election meetings.

Observers in Minsk-Kalinovskaya Electoral Constituency No.108 fixed the fact of disruption of the meeting with voters of candidate Victor Yanchurevich, which had been planned in the conference hall of the Housing and Utility Service (HUS) No.35 and had been coordinated well in advance. The administration of HUS No.35 said that the conference hall was under repairs.

A. Levkovich, the UDF candidate in Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, said that throughout the whole stage of pre-electoral agitation none of state bodies, not a single head of an enterprise or educational establishment ever gave him any help in organizing meetings. The Brest Executive Committee rejected Mr Levkovich's application on holding pre-election pickets. The reason was found by Brest authorities in a small mistake (instead of 2008, it was written 2007-2009).

Those single cases, when candidates-opponents, together and on their own will, held meetings with voters were fixed in Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58. Mechislav Kastsyuk and Ivan Shega held a joint meeting in the territory of the OJSC "Slonim Worsted Spinning Factory". As noted by local observers, in relation to the UDF candidate I. Shega, no obstacles were made in holding meetings with voters either in the city movie theatre of Slonim or at Slonim enterprises of food industry. The newspaper "Slonimskiy Vestnik" (21.09.2008) published an announcement about I. Shega's meeting with voters.

Unlike previous election campaigns, observers noted other positive facts. For example, according to the assessment of the course of the agitation campaign, made by Igor Maslovskiy, a candidate from the UDF in Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3, at meetings with voters in labour collectives and at parents' meetings he practically felt no obstacles on the part of the authorities. I. Maslovskiy held his pre-election pickets on September 20-22 from 12:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and there were no incidents in the course thereof. Representatives of I. Maslovskiy's opponent – G. Anischuk – were also present in all the places, where pickets were held, and disseminated their agitation materials there.

According to observers, in Luninets Electoral Constituency No.13, at the beginning of the agitation campaign, active work with voters was conducted by Larissa Vershilovich, a Deputy of the House of presentatives.

The city authorities promoted her meetings at many enterprises and organizations of the city. However, in the middle of the agitation period, all the three candidates in Luninets Electoral Constituency No.13, according to observers, had equal chances to meet their voters at institutions and enterprises of the city. Also, in Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No.14, at the beginning of the agitation period, city authorities promoted organization of meetings with voters of Zinaida Mandrovskaya, a candidate from the authorities. On August 3, Evgeniy Perets, a UDF candidate, member of the PCB, was twice prohibited to meet the voters: in the conference hall of the DOSAAF sporting complex and in “Svitanak” store. However, in the middle of the agitation period, all the three candidates in Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No.14, as reported by the observers, had equal chances to run their pre-election agitation at institutions and enterprises of the city, as well as at parents’ meetings in schools.

Facts of using administrative resources

Agitation through holding meetings with voters in a number of constituencies was held with usage of administrative resource.

According to local observers, election agents of Leonid Kovalevich, a candidate for Deputy in Ivatsevichi Electoral Constituency No.11, were agitating for him during their working hours and went together to the meetings over the dwelling settlements of the Ivatsevichi District. On September 16-17, L. Kovalevich managed to hold meetings with voters in five dwelling settlements: Ogarevichi, Kukava, Vyalikiya Krugovichi, Budcha and Chudzin. The agitation products of L. Kovalevich were disseminated through post offices: postmen brought his leaflets to residents together with newspapers. No payment for these services had ever arrived to the account of the Gantsevichi “Belpochta” branch.

Vladimir Adashkevich, a candidate in Orsha-Dnieper Electoral Constituency No.27, Deputy of the House of Representatives, went to his pre-election meetings over the region together with Vladimir Khutskiy, Deputy Chair of the Orsha District Executive Committee for social issues, and with officials of the Dubrovno District Executive Committee and Orsha City Executive Committee.

In Soligorsk Rural Constituency No.76, candidate Anna Lavrukevich, Director General of the SA “Belbyt”, made use, for her travels over the Kopyl District, the service cars of her election agents, in particular, Alla Romanovskaya, Deputy Chair of the Kopyl District Executive Committee. Her agitation tours were made together with her election agents during their work hours.

A similar violation was fixed also in Slutsk Electoral Constituency No.74. Certain employees of the Slutsk District Executive Committee took the candidate for Deputy Inessa Klyaschuk to her pre-election meetings over the District in their service cars. They were: Pyotr Dauguchits, Deputy Chair of the District Executive Committee for social sphere and ideology work; Larissa Dobrovolskaya, head of the division of ideology work; and Nazdeya Tsvirko, Chair of the Gantsevichi Rural Soviet.

Organization of meetings of pro-governmental candidates in Bobruisk-Lenin No.78, Bobruisk-Pervomai No.79 and Bobruisk Rural No.80 Constituencies with the labour collective of the OJSC “FanDOK” was entrusted to Liudmila Savotina, head of the division for education of the Bobruisk City Executive Committee. The meetings with Alena Shamal, Vladimir Karpyak and Anatoly Glaz took place during work hours.

In Molodechno City Electoral Constituency No.70, as fixed by observers, Yafim Idelchik, Deputy Chair of the District Executive Committee, during his weekly sittings of enterprise chiefs and entrepreneurs, held agitation for Nikolai Zhgun.

Victor Podchinenkov, UDF candidate in Grodno Rural Electoral Constituency No.52, was informed by the voters that on September 16, the hostel of TPP-2 will house a non-applied meeting with his opponent Nikolai Gorbochonok, First Secretary of the Grodno District Committee of the BRYU. Having seen Mr Podchinenkov in the premises of the hostel, Mr Gorbochonok hurried to escape the dialogue and left the meeting with voters.

In Zhodino Electoral Constituency No.66, at the PA “BelAZ”, on September 17, a training session of ideological activists was held. In the course thereof, Stanislav Yakubovich, Deputy Director General for ideological and informational work, gave to each of the participants two agitation posters with the programme and biography of Vasyl Lyutsikov, candidate from the power.

In Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, candidate for Deputy Vasil Vavrenyuk fixed facts of direct pressure on voters with the aim to force them to cast their ballot papers for his competitor in Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8 Nikolai Andreichuk, Court Chair of the Kamenets District. The bosses of the hospital in Vysokoe village gave instructions to their personnel to vote for M. Andreichuk.

In Slutsk Electoral Constituency No.74, Pyotr Dauguchyts, Deputy Chair of the Slutsk District Executive Committee for social sphere issues and ideological work, and Natalia Sherstnyova, deputy head of the division of ideological work of the same Executive Committee, and bosses and ideological workers of the Central District Hospital and the OJSC “Slutsk Sugar Refining Factory”, at labour meetings were openly calling to vote

for candidate Inessa Klyaschuk, First Secretary of the Slutsk City Committee of the BRYU, by belittling her opponent Anatoly Yurevich, a member of the BSDP (H).

Appealing

Svetlana Alyaksyuk, head of the initiative group of Igor Maslovskiy, UDF candidate, filed complaints to the CoEC of Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3 on the facts of pre-schedule agitation for candidate Anna Anischuk in the regional newspaper “Narodnaya Tribuna” and in the weekly “Brestskiy Vestnik”. To the sitting, where the complaint was considered, observer N. Koush was admitted, and Ms Alyaksyuk was invited. The CoEC failed to find any facts of any pre-schedule agitation in the newspaper materials dealing with A. Anischuk. Satisfaction of the complaint was rejected. The commission chair reported that any candidate for Deputy shall have the right to address any newspapers and tell about his or her civil and political activity. According to her estimate, it will not be agitation.

In this context, candidate Igor Maslovskiy sent an appeal to the newspaper “Narodnaya Tribuna” with a proposal to publish an article about his professional and public activity. Copies of the address were sent to the founders of the paper: the Brest Regional Executive Committee and Brest Regional Soviet of Deputies, as well as to the CoEC. However, his material was no published.

Non-registered candidate in Baranovichi Constituency Alexander Galkevich on 05.09.2008 sent complaints to the Supreme Court of the republic of Belarus. At the sitting of the Supreme Court, A. Galkevich said to the judge that the lower instances, which considered his complaint, refused to show him the subscription lists and the applications, which served the basis for his rejection. The judge allowed him to get acquainted with the applications of signatories, where they assert that they had signed the lists by themselves, but the dates were put by someone else. A. Galkevich remembered the name of one of the applicants – she was his neighbour. When meeting her in Baranovichi he asked why she had recalled her signature. The woman answered that some people from the Executive Committee came to her and intimidated her: they said that because the date was input by some other hand, she might be sued and put in jail. Under these threats, the elderly woman signed everything she was offered.

V. VOTING

Early voting

The procedure of early voting in the country caused repeated criticism both by local observers and international institutions engaged in election observation. It was also repeatedly noted that power bodies, heads of labour collectives and educational establishments made massive use of dependence of students or workers for enforcing them to take part in early voting. We can state that compulsion to early voting was aimed to manipulate the voting outcomes. Firstly, the early voting gives opportunity “to ensure” the required voter turnout, necessary to recognize this or that election as valid. Secondly, the design of ballot boxes, the practice of gluing (sealing) them, which is not transparent for observers, give room for replacing ballot papers, which can ensure the victory of the candidate, supported by the authorities.

With account of the fact that PECs practically have no representatives of democratic political parties and public associations, manipulation of the voting outcomes is still more probable.

The local press published timely announcements of constituency electoral commissions about the start of early voting. Appeals to vote early were broadly disseminated, and it was emphasized all the time that voters need no confirmation of their impossibility to vote on the election day. The observation of the process of early voting showed that nobody in electoral commissions asked citizens why they had come to early voting.

Observers fixed numerous facts of compulsion to early voting. The main categories of voters, forced to early voting, were as follows: students and other pupils (especially those who live in hostels, residents of workers’ hostels, employees of the budget sphere (school teachers and teachers at vocational, secondary special and higher educational establishments), as well as servicemen and employees of the Ministries of Internal Affairs (MIA) and for Emergencies (MfE).

On September 24, at the Francis Skaryna Gomel State University, in the course of the sitting with dean deputies for upbringing, Sergey Khanenya, pro-rector for upbringing and ideological work, gave an order that all the students, who live in hostels, shall go to early voting. As to the students who would refuse to vote for their political convictions, he ordered to hold “explanatory work” with them. Also, it was ordered to submit data, before 5:00 p.m. on 28.09.2008, about the count of students who had taken part in early voting for presentation to the rector.

A similar situation was observed in all higher schools (universities) of the country. Practically everywhere lessons on Saturday, September 27, were cancelled to make room for the students to take part in early voting.

Students of Hostel No.2 of the Gomel University, located at 122 Kirova Street, assert that the lady-head of the hostel threatened, in case of refusal to vote early, to deprive of the right to live in the hostel. Galina Karasyova, deputy dean of the Mathematics Department for upbringing, recorded the names of those students who refused to go to early voting and asked to give reasons. Similar threats were pronounced to the students of the A. A. Kulyashov Mogilyov State University, who live in Hostel No.3. Facts were registered, when stewards of academic groups were ordered to compile lists of all the students who took part in early voting.

On September 25, at polling station No.30, located in the Grodno Regional Institute of Qualification Improvement of Managers and Education Specialists, students stood in lines. They were brought to early voting under oral command of the administration.

Apart from the administrative pressure, pickets were organized in a number of establishments. On September 26, a non-sanctioned picket was held by BRYU members of the Grodno Pedagogical College, in the course of which BRYU activists urged students to go to the polling station and take part in early voting.

On September 26, Victoria Gaurylenka, commandant of the workers' hostel in Schmita in Mogilyov, demanded from hostel residents to vote early, immediately after their work shift, without getting into their rooms.

On September 26, an essential part of the contingent of missile unit soldiers was brought for early voting from Paulinava village, where the garrison is deployed, to the city of Baranovichi.

School collectives of Baranovichi received a demand of Nikolai Khitryk, head of the City department of People's Education, to go to early voting. The effect of bureaucrats' efforts is confirmed by the fact that within three days of early voting in Secondary School No.16 of Baranovichi 65% of the collective members had voted. According to observers, within the same period, at polling station No.16 (building of the correspondence department of the Baranovichi State University) of Baranovichi-Western Electoral Constituency No.5,80% of all the voters had cast their ballots.

Gennadi Ivanov, Director of the OJSC "Belaruskabel" in Mozyr, who was at the same time Chair of one of the PECs in Mozyr Electoral Constituency No.42, repeatedly warned his shop and division managers about their personal responsibility for participation of their subordinates in early voting. In have a due control, he compiled a list of telephone numbers

of the workers of the enterprise, by using which the heads of subdivisions were obliged to remind their subordinates about their duty to go to early voting.

On September 22, Alexei Krasyuk, deputy head of the Plant's Administration for Automation at the RUE "Belarusian Metallurgy Works" in Zhlobin, sent a special list through the plant's electronic mail system to all the heads of the bays. It was received by bay managers: Mikhail Buyanov, Alexander Guzov, Sergey Ilyin and others, in total – 16 persons. Apart from the order to force their subordinates into early voting, the list "brought to the notice" of the workers for whom they should vote. Vladimir Batan was meant, head of the repair shop of the plant's metallurgy equipment. The order on early voting covered even those workers who were at vacation or on leave for rearing kids. They were also persistently urged to go to early voting.

Vladimir Karpovich, head of the DRBU-208 (Road-Construction Entity) of the city of Schuchin, forced the workers of his collective to vote in advance for Maria Biryukova, a candidate in Schuchin Electoral Constituency No.60, Deputy Chair of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee.

Victor Pinchuk, Director of the OJSC "Uskhod" Agrarian Combine in the Mogilyov District, threatened his workers with dismissal, should they fail to vote early and for Alexander Razgonov, a candidate in Mogilyov Rural Electoral Constituency No.88 and Chair of the Mogilyov District Executive Committee.

In the course of early voting, numerous facts of violations of the EC were registered.

In Gomel-Soviet Electoral Constituency No.34, the PEC of polling station No.13 refused to register Leonid Udovichenko as an observer. Similarly, Vasyl Pakatashkin was refused registration as an observer at polling station No.4 in Gomel-Central Electoral Constituency No.33. In both cases, the observers had been nominated by partisan protocols from the PBPF. The reason for refusal was indicated in the absence of a seal on their nomination documents, which could not be put there, since the Party structure, which had nominated them, is not a legal entity. It should be noted that under similar protocols observers Evgeniy Suvorov and Anatol Paplauny were registered at polling stations Nos. 4 and 8 of Gomel-Industrial Electoral Constituency No.35.

In Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1 at polling stations Nos. 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 27, 30 and 42, there were no stands with information materials about the candidates, which is a violation of Article 45 of the EC. A. Levkovich, a candidate for Deputy in this constituency, sent his complaints to the observers of the OSCE, CIS and CEC.

At polling station No.32 of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1 (Secondary School No.16) rough violations were revealed of the voting procedure: the ballot box was not properly sealed and allowed non-sanctioned access inside. The room, where it was kept, had free access. A similar situation was fixed at polling station No.15 of Baranovichi-Western Electoral Constituency No.5. To the observer's request addressed to the member of the commission named Ivanyushkina to seal up the sides and bottom of the ballot box, a resolute refusal followed.

Mikhail Varanets, an observer in Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58, was refused information by the CoEC of this constituency. While repeatedly addressing for information about the elections, the observer found out that the commission was practically inoperative: there were no members on duty, no schedule and registration logbook of visitors. Whenever visited by the observer, a candidate for Deputy or his election agents, A. Machalina and S. Gurskaya, employees of the Slonim Executive Committee, left for an hour their workplaces and went into the room of the constituency commission. Observer M. Varanets addressed his complaint to the CEC against the unsatisfactory work of the commission members. The answer of L. Ermoshina of 15.09.2008 ran that the on duty schedule of the commission was its working document and should not be presented on demand of observers. "We hereby draw your attention, " the letter further ran, "that the observer's rights at preparation and holding the elections are established by Part Four of Article 13 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus. In accordance with this provision, you have no rights to demand any working documents of the constituency electoral commission. " The application of M. Varanets was sent back, to the commission of Slonim Electoral Constituency No.58.

In certain constituencies, observers noted positive points in comparison with previous elections. During the whole period of agitation and early voting, the constituency commissions of Luninets No.13, Pinsk City No.14 and Pinsk Rural No.15 presented information to observers that they asked for. On September 11, the CoEC of Baranovichi Rural Electoral Constituency No.7 considered at its sitting the issue of inaccuracy in the property declaration of Oleg Pashko, a candidate from the "European Coalition". The issue was raised to remove candidate A. Pashko from elections. As a result of voting, candidate A. Pashko was not removed.

In Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, as remarked by observers, at polling stations, all the documentation for elections was properly prepared. The request of M. Byalesta, lady-observer from the

BSDP, to the Chair of the PEC No.52 to sign all the ballot papers was perceived positively, and the ballot papers were signed.

At polling stations Nos. 13 and 19 of Brest-Western Electoral Constituency No.1, the observers of the BHC was given the data about the number of issued ballot papers and about the number of voters who had voted early. At polling stations Nos. 5 and 32, the observers were refused of the data about the number of issued ballot papers and about the number of voters who had voted early.

In Brest-Eastern Electoral Constituency No.3, observers of the BHC held monitoring of 13 polling stations: Nos. 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 26, 28, 29, 30 and 31. At 4 (31%) polling stations (Nos. 11, 29, 9 and 10) the commissions refused to give information, while the remaining PECs (69%) gave either approximate information or presented exhaustive data. At polling stations Nos. 19, 51 and 52 of Belaya Vezha Electoral Constituency No.8, observers of the BHC also could get information about the early voting.

Observers remarked that final proportions of votes at the early and main voting were different. It is obvious that an essential role belonged here to absence of control over the vote tabulation in the course of early voting.

In Starovilenskaya Electoral Constituency No.105, at polling station No.449, as a result of early voting, 675 voters, which makes 68.4% of all early voters, had cast their ballots for candidate Nikolai Samaseika, Chair of the Court of the Tsentralny District of Minsk. For Anatol Lebedska, Chair of the UCP, 84 ballot papers were cast, which makes 8.5%. However, on the voting day, when thorough observation was held, and vote tabulation was made immediately after the end of voting, these candidates managed to win 180 (44%) and 124 (30.3%) votes, respectively. Thus, in comparison with early voting, the number of votes cast for candidate A. Lebedska on the voting day increased by 3.6 times.

Voting and vote tabulation

Facts of refusal to provide information about the progress of voting and multiple manipulations with ballot papers were noted by many observers who monitored the election on the voting day.

In Mosty Electoral Constituency No.56, at the polling station in Zanki village of the Svisloch District, ballot papers were given to voters without signatures. Only after a voter made his or her choice, the paper was taken back, stamped and returned to the voter for dropping into the ballot box. This was a blatant violation of the secrecy of election.

In Mogilyov-Central Electoral Constituency No.85, at polling station No.68, located in the building of the Mogilyov State Machine-Building Vocational College, after 10-minute calculation, the ballot papers were taken out to the next room, where the commission chair wrote the final figures into the protocol. At 8:10 p.m., a copy of the final voting protocol was hang out, signed by the commission chair Valery Klepchukov and secretary Liudmila Samusyova. According to the protocol, in total 679 out of 991 voters cast their ballots at the station. For Alexander Yushkevich, deputy of the House of Representatives, – 521 votes, for Alexander Silkov – 25, Alexei Pavlovskiy – 47, Yuri Leknin – 31, against all – 55. According to the observers of the BHC, at this station the voting outcomes had nothing to do with reality. Firstly, the voter turnout was very low: according to their calculations, in the period from 2 to 8 p.m. only 33 voters appeared. At the exit from the station, the voters said that they saw very few signatures in the voters' lists. Secondly, it is impossible to count 679 ballot papers within 10 minutes.

Observers note that final proportions of votes cast for individual candidates are strongly different at different polling stations: the factor of control over vote tabulation played its essential role.

In Dyatlovo Electoral Constituency No.55, at the Torkachov polling station (where observers controlled the tabulation process), under official data, 307 persons voted for Yanina Guzovskaya, UDF candidate, and for the pro-governmental candidate, deputy of the House of Representatives Mikhail Orda – 402. At the Vainevichi polling station (where observers could not control the tabulation), the official data was as follows: for Ms Guzovskaya – 17 persons, for Mr Orda – 390.

In Grodno-Central Electoral Constituency No.50 at polling station No.42 (where observers controlled the tabulation) the voting outcomes were as follows: 521 persons voted for Sergey Maskevich, deputy of the House of Representatives; for Sergey Antusevich, a member of the BPF, and chair of the primary unit of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union of miners, chemists, power men, oil processors, transport workers, builders and other workers, – 336 persons; for Alexander Mikaluta, a member of the LDPB, – 310, against all – 440. The respective figures at the polling stations, where there was no observation, are as follows: station No.5 – 822, 144, 104 and 148; station No.6 – 756, 214, 146 and 156; station No.39 – 797, 148, 144 and 99; station No.40 – 492, 243, 101 and 85; station No.41 – 672, 190, 172 and 115. At the closed polling station No.23 Institution of Public Health “Grodno Regional Clinical Perinatal Centre”, 154 persons out of 154 voted for Sergey Maskevich – exactly 100% of voters.

In rural constituencies, commission members used to go out in plenty from polling stations to home voting. In such cases, observation was practically impossible. This situation was observed in Baranovichi Rural Electoral Constituency No.7, Ivatsevichi Electoral Constituency No.11 and others.

According to observers, at the start of vote tabulation, many observers were removed out of stations, and practically nowhere separate vote tabulation was used.

In Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No.14, at polling station No.34, which was located in the premises of the College of the Establishment of Education " A. S. Pushkin Brest State University", at the beginning of vote tabulation the observers were removed from the station. It took place in the presence of Mikhail Samolazov, Deputy Chair of the Pinsk City Executive Committee. At polling station No.27 of this very constituency, at the start of vote tabulation, the ballot papers from all the ballot boxes were unloaded altogether. After observer Alexander Vasiliev pointed to this as a fact of violation of the EC and began making photos, he was removed together with all other observers. Having gone around the building, this observer could see through the window that the members of the commission were opening sealed packs with ballot papers. However, quite soon the observer had to leave his "observation point" under the window fearing detention by the militia. Later observer Vasiliev was not admitted to the building of the Executive Committee, where the CoEC was located and where he wanted to file a complaint. At the CoEC of Pinsk City Electoral Constituency No.14, observers from the OSCE and observer from the BHC Alexander Buchyk were not allowed to observe the vote tabulation, made on the basis of protocols of precinct commissions.

Also in the mass order, observers were not allowed to be present at delivery to CoECs of protocols with the outcomes of voting at polling stations. The CoEC of Mogilyov-October Electoral Constituency No.86 refused observers Boris Bukhel and Vladimir Parfyonov of this right, since, as said Nadezhda Madzhyna, secretary of the CoEC No.86, the transfer of protocols is "the technical work of the commission", and not a sitting thereof. Similar refusals were received by observers Alexander Korolyov and Dmitri Solovyov at the CoEC of Mogilyov-Central Electoral Constituency No.85, observer Eduard Brokarev at the CoEC of Gorki Electoral Constituency No.81, and others.

The early voting was characterized by broad-scale compulsion to such voting through using people's dependence from the place where they work or study. The work of the constituency and precinct electoral commissions

in the course of early voting was not transparent. The commission chairs refused to provide observers with the information about the number of voters registered at polling stations, the number of issued ballot papers, and about the number of voters, who took part in early voting. The chairs of the constituency electoral commissions refused to report the number of voters, who took part in early voting in the territory of the constituency.

The observers were not given a chance to monitor the process of vote tabulation; apart from the backs of the members of electoral commissions, who grouped at the table with ballot papers, the observers saw nothing. At the polling stations, where observers could monitor the vote tabulation, the gap between the pro-governmental and independent or oppositional candidates was not so big. This is an indication of the closed character of vote tabulation, which could be used by precinct electoral commissions for falsification of voting results.

CONCLUSIONS

The elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the 4^{th} convocation were held, same as the previous election campaigns, with serious violations of standards of free and fair elections, adopted by the OSCE and Belarusian legislation.

The electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus fails to create the necessary legal conditions for free and fair elections; the practice of application of this legislation results in serious violations of these standards.

Formation of electoral commissions was conducted, same as before, without the necessary transparency and reasonable criteria and procedure of selection of candidates for members of commissions. This gave room to bodies of local power to make another session of manipulating the process of forming them. As a result, to an essential extent the commissions were formed of representatives of the executive power and their subordinate or dependent organizations. The trend remained to form precinct commissions under the “industrial” principle – from representatives of one and the same labour collective under formally different ways of nomination for these precinct commissions. Besides, as a rule, such a person was elected to be the chair of the commission, on whom other members of the commission were in labour dependence.

Practically all the sittings of District Executive Committees and district administrations were of formal character; during these sittings, there were no real discussion of the candidates nominated for precinct commissions. The sittings just formally approved the earlier compiled lists of members of precinct electoral commissions.

A certain increase of the number of representatives of oppositional parties in electoral commissions was a positive point. However, this increase did not result in formation of really independent commissions.

Registration of initiative groups and candidates for deputies revealed, as compared with previous campaigns, certain improvements – the number of candidates whose registration was rejected went down, including among representatives of the opposition. The procedure of citizens’ signing-in (collection of subscriptions) became essentially better. The monitoring participants did not fix any actual obstacles or detentions at signing-in, the pressure went down on members of initiative groups of oppositional candidates. However, same as earlier, many facts were observed of usage of administrative resources when collecting subscriptions for the candidates

supported by the authorities, enforcement to signing-in, collection of subscriptions by non-members of candidates' initiative groups, and restriction of access of oppositional initiative groups to workers' and students' hostels and in the territory of military units.

Same non-transparent was the procedure of verification of materials on nomination of candidates, which allowed commissions to exploit unequal approach to particular candidates.

As before, the conditions for running pre-electoral agitation were not favourable for holding any serious agitation campaign, so necessary for every citizen for making his or her justified choice. The created conditions for publishing candidates' programmes and their performances on radio and television, the volume of state's funding of agitation, regulation of meetings with voters by the provision of legislation on mass actions did not allow the parties and candidates to hold their full-fledged agitation.

According to the law, candidates received opportunities to present their programmes on certain TV and radio channels and published their presentations in predefined volume in state-owned newspapers. By estimates of media experts, broadcasts of candidates' TV presentations took place in the hours, not comfortable for the broad audience of viewers. A positive point is the fact that later, because of critical estimates of observers, upon decision of the CEC, the candidates' TV performances were repeated. However, this did not essentially improve the situation.

Certain oppositional candidates were put on unequal terms in placing their agitation materials. The agitation through printed agitation materials was held, in a number of electoral constituencies, with the help of administrative resources. The pro-governmental candidates had all the opportunities to place their pre-electoral posters in crowded public places – shops, state institutions and enterprises.

According to observers' estimates, in most regions, decisions about allocation of sites for placing agitation materials could not, as a rule, provide candidates with sufficient opportunities for agitation. Only one place per precinct was allocated, which was obviously not enough. For making use of the area of shops, enterprises and institutions, it was required to coordinate all the actions with their heads and managers, which also made the pre-electoral agitation more complicated. Allocation of premises (rooms) for candidates' to meet voters in many cases failed to make proper conditions for holding a broad campaign of such meetings.

The state-owned mass media were holding in fact hidden agitation, by actively informing the voters about the activities of certain pro-governmental candidates.

In the course of this election campaign, to a lesser extent than during previous campaigns, censoring of candidates' agitation materials was used. However, facts of censoring were also registered.

This campaign was also notable by frequent dissemination of agitation materials without output data, which can indicate use of additional financial sources, apart from the official funds. Electoral commissions in fact did not prevent dissemination of agitation materials without output data. This resulted in a certain expansion of agitation opportunities, which can be assessed positively. However, it makes obvious the need of changes in legislative conditions for regulating agitation in the election process.

As before, the voting and vote tabulation gave grounds for serious criticism.

Compulsion to early voting was of mass character. Same as in previous election campaigns, the main categories of voters enforced to early voting were students (especially those who live in students' hostels), residents of workers' hostels, employees of the budget sphere (teachers of schools, vocational, secondary-special and higher educational institutions), as well as militaries, militiamen ministerial workers and others. Observers registered facts of organized voting also in certain settlements, where people were brought in buses to polling stations for taking part in early voting.

With account of the fact that storage of ballot boxes, the practice of gluing (sealing) them is not transparent for observers, the participants of the election process have suspicions that at the end of early voting replacement of ballot papers took place, which could completely guarantee the victory of the candidate, who had been supported by the authorities. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that PECs practically had no representatives of democratic political parties and public associations.

The decision made by the CEC on the necessity to glue up the slot for dropping ballot papers in ballot boxes after each day of early voting was positive, but could not solve the problems related to the procedure of early voting.

In the course of voting, restrictions were observed of the rights of observers to receive information. The data about the number of voters, issued ballot papers of the PEC and the number of those who had voted early was hidden from the observers without any explanations. These facts evidence that at this stage the principle of transparency of the election process was completely breached.

Also, the process of vote tabulation was absolutely closed for national observers. Practically all the observers-human rights defenders could only

just be present at polling stations. Commissions used assistance of militiamen for not to allow any real observation of vote tabulation. According to observers, in many commissions no real tabulation (count) of votes took place – the members of commissions distributed ballot papers into piles according to the number of candidates, but the tabulation was made by the chair and secretary of the commission in a separate room and lasted just a couple of minutes. Rather often after such tabulation it turned out that visually similar piles of ballot papers resulted in figures that differed by factor of times. Observers had an impression that most of commission members signed the total protocols (minutes) not knowing real totals of voting.

The non-transparency of election procedures had a result that observers and the candidates whose rights were broken were deprived of any real possibilities to appeal against violations. As before, violations of many election procedures cannot be appealed against in the judicial order. Formal attitude to consideration of complaints by electoral commissions, the CEC inclusive, made submission of complaints so inefficient that many candidates refused to submit them whatsoever, despite numerous violations of their rights.

On the outcomes of the elections, candidates lodged in totals 35 complaints to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), including those demanding to recognize the outcomes of the elections invalid. All the applicants were rejected, and the CEC in general did not find any serious violations of the electoral legislation.

Human rights defenders made a conclusion that although in the course of political campaign of 2008 there were certain positive changes, the elections of Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the 4th convocation failed to meet the standards of free and fair elections, which does not give any reasons to trust the totals thereof as announced by the CEC.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE ELECTION PROCESS IN BELARUS

It is necessary to amend the Electoral Code (EC) in such a manner as to ensure the right of every participant of the election process to enjoy the constitutional principle of judicial defence in all the cases whenever the participant believes that his or her rights were broken.

Electoral commissions

1. The EC and Law on the CEC should be amended in such a way, as to ensure multi-partisan and pluralistic presentation in electoral commissions of all levels.
2. Bodies of executive power should be separated from organization and holding the elections.
3. The material and technical support (logistics) of the elections should be made for the budget money, allocated for holding the elections and distributed among the respective electoral commissions.

Observers

1. The EC should be amended in such a way, as the electoral commissions could guarantee the transparency of all the election procedures and ensuring the rights of observers, including the right to observe the voting process and vote tabulation from such distance that allows noticing violations.
2. The EC should be amended in such a way, as to oblige electoral commissions to give out copies of final protocols (minutes) of vote tabulation at all levels.

Registration of candidates

1. The income and property declarations presented by candidates should not be used as the basis to reject registration. The EC should be amended in such a way, as to present certificates for candidates' registration issued by the competent bodies.
2. The procedures of checking the materials presented by candidates for registration should be open for candidates and observers.

Agitation

1. It is necessary to cancel ungrounded restrictions of the freedom of assembly and association, expression of ideas, for which purpose respective amendments should be made in the EC and other legislative acts. It is necessary to exclude or essentially restrict the legislative provisions relating to slander and defamation, in particular, in relation to officials.
2. The EC should be added with the provision about candidates' electoral funds and transparent and accountable system of filling them in with budgetary money and other permitted sources.
3. It is necessary to add the EC with the provisions about equal access of candidates and political parties to all the broadcasts, which cover the election campaign, including news and other information programmes.
4. The restrictions and sanctions, as envisioned by the EC, should be applied to the maximum extent for regulating the use by officials of state-owned media with the aim of agitation.

List of voters

1. The EC should be amended in such a way, as to ensure drawing up of the updatable centralized list of voters.
2. Lists of voters should be accessible for observers.

Voting and vote tabulation

1. The procedure of early voting as prescribed in the EC should be amended as follows:
   - to narrow down the opportunities for early voting only to the cases of voting under a preliminary application in case of impossibility to appear at the polling station on the voting day;
   - the number of early voters should be put into the protocol every day; the outcomes of early voting, same as of voting in particular location of the voter, should be fixed separately in the final protocol of every polling station.